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THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound



WALK WITH ME: MARTIN LUTHER KING
AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA IN

SELMA

PLUS

- MICHAEL MANN'S 'BLACKHAT' ● PETER STRICKLAND'S 'THE DUKE OF BURGUNDY'
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Of human bondage

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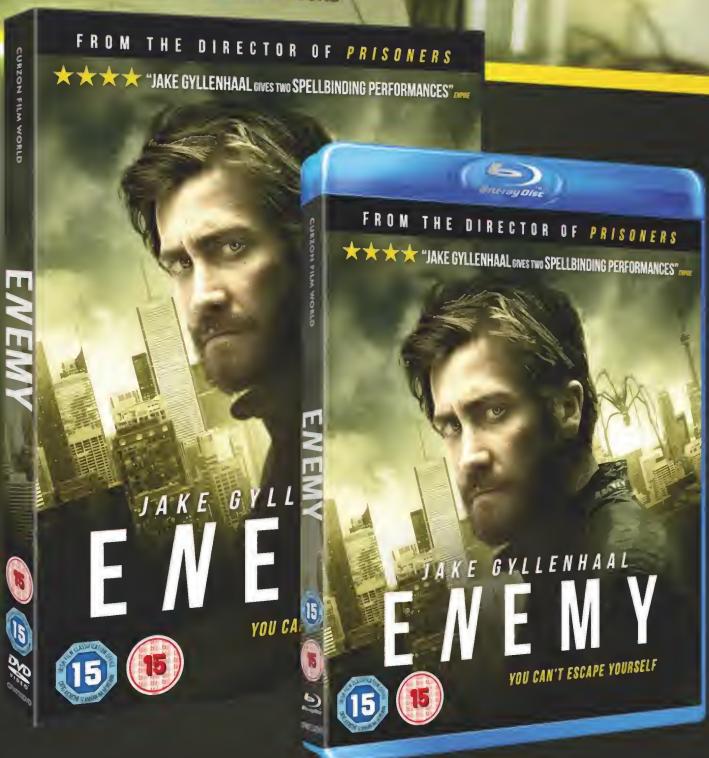
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COVER

Design by Alex Williamson
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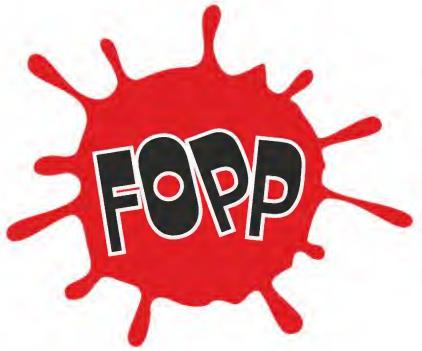
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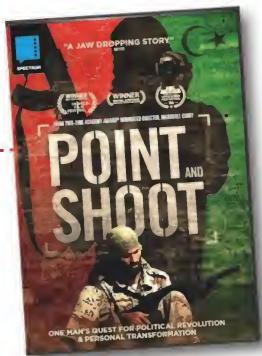
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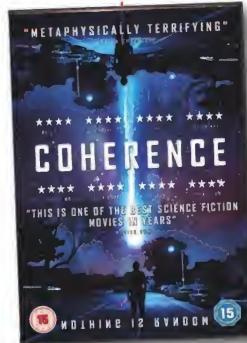


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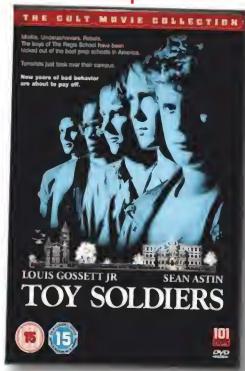
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Editorial Nick James



SPOILING POINT

Where does the line between knowing too much in advance about a film and knowing just enough lie? This age-old question has become more urgent the more widely available huge amounts of prior information about a film have become. Most critics prefer to know as much as they can. This research-heavy approach is consistent with an idea of critical professionalism inherited, I would guess, from both news journalism and academia. And good research is what you'd expect from the writers of a magazine like ours (and I hope you're right).

However, there is another legitimate position, which is that a film ought to be experienced without the preconceptions prior knowledge often brings. The basis of this argument is that temporary willed ignorance better respects films designed to have an impact on casual viewers (ie, most of them), better mirroring the experience of the average punter who might choose a film based purely on the appeal of an actor, the sound of a title or a premise they like the sound of. That all of these prompts are themselves snippets of prior information doesn't matter, because they are of a kind designed by filmmakers and marketeers in part to lure audiences.

For myself, I usually prefer to go in blank – even if it's an auteurist piece and I've seen many of the director's films before – and do the research after the screening. Two days ago, for instance, I saw Michael Mann's *Blackhat*. I once wrote a slender book on Mann's *Heat*, so I have some views about what makes him tick; others on the *Sight & Sound* team had made me aware that an online debate was raging about *Blackhat's* status as either a clunker or a *film maudit*, but I read nothing in advance. Given that it's a thriller more interested in moments than in its plot, willed ignorance, I would argue, made it much easier to enter and enjoy, and I did exult in its fabulous construction.

On the other hand, knowing nothing about *American Sniper* when I watched it, other than the fact that Clint Eastwood directed it, might have been a mistake. I found the film brutal in its seeming disregard for non-Americans, and still do, but at the time I fell back on Eastwood's evident structural skills and the plausibly solid performance of Bradley Cooper as a man crumbling under the pressure of war. I wonder if I'd have given the film the same auteurist break had I known beforehand how psychopathic

At 'Sight & Sound' we pride ourselves on taking cinema seriously and it is often almost impossible to write a cogent analysis of a film without giving some or even much of the plot away



the film's real-life subject seems to have been.

Critics, then, are always wrestling with the problem of information and how to make use of it, and the same applies to how much they themselves should impart – which leads us to the thorny matter of spoilers. It's a dichotomy. We get complaints whenever we give a plot detail away. Sometimes we include a spoiler warning, especially if the article is about a thriller, part of the pleasure of which obviously depends on suspense. But we pride ourselves on taking cinema seriously and it is often almost impossible to write a cogent analysis of a film without giving some or even much of the plot away.

I can understand why this matter has become such a sticking point. It's partly to do with the film industry's reliance on prior knowledge in order to get bums on seats. Why else are there so many biopics and novel adaptations if not because the industry believes viewers want, and even need, to know quite a lot of what the film's about before they see it? (The inescapable deluge of info that precedes the bigger-budget films also contributes to the feeling one regularly encounters in film-goers that the movies have lost some of their magic).

It all comes down to what you think film criticism in the digital age is for. If you're looking for a quick guide as to what's out this week and whether it's worth your money, there is a cacophony of advice out there, but much less, I would suggest, that's worth reading after you've seen the film, which is what I suggest readers who worry most about spoilers do with this magazine. Of course, we'll continue to police reveals with spoiler warnings, but there will be times when the article needs to say more than is convenient. We believe you'll think it's worth it. ☺

IN THE FRAME

'AN OUTSIDER AND A REBEL'



Up the garden path: James Stewart and Hepburn in *The Philadelphia Story*

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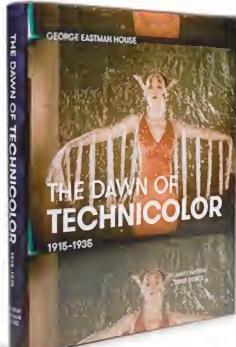
Female film critics

To celebrate International Women's Day, join 'Sight & Sound' as we rediscover and pay homage to a range of female voices on cinema, from little-known early reviewers to contemporary cultural critics, including C.A. Lejeune, Penelope Gilliatt, Dilys Powell (right) and bell hooks. The discussion will take place at 18.30 on 9 March in the library at BFI Southbank, London.



The Dawn of Technicolor, 1915-1935

Proving resplendently that Technicolor had a vibrant history before the yellow brick road is this lavish study of Technicolor Motion Picture Corporation's early years, charting the endless research and creative and technical innovations that led to successes such as Walt Disney's first colour animated short, 'Flowers and Trees' (1932) but also troubled productions such as 'Ben-Hur' (1925).



Katharine Hepburn was a brilliant actress but seen as box-office poison – until *The Philadelphia Story* made her human, vulnerable and sexy

By Dan Callahan

In the summer of 1938, Katharine Hepburn found herself in a quandary at her family home in Connecticut. She had recently been nominated for an Oscar for one of her finest performances, *Alice Adams* (1935). She had just made *Stage Door* (1937), *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) and *Holiday* (1938), and those movies are classics now, but her press had been mixed for them then. "It seemed to me that I was in a very odd situation," wrote Hepburn in her 1991 memoir *Me: Stories of My Life*. "Certainly I had done some very boring pictures. But then, I had done four really good pictures, and they had just not done well."

Why hadn't they done well? Perhaps because Hepburn had played heiresses in all three of her last movies, and in all three of them she was allowed to do what she is now revered for, running rampant, asserting herself, and triumphing over convention. She does go through a kind of emotional trial by fire in *Stage Door*, but that movie gives her no male romantic interest and seems to be endorsing her cheerful (and maybe even Sapphic?) independence at the end. And her partnership with Cary Grant in *Bringing Up Baby* and *Holiday* seems more brother-sister underneath than anything else. Doesn't she seem like a little sister always tagging along and making a nuisance of herself in *Bringing Up Baby*? And doesn't *Holiday* make a case for a group of likeminded friends rather than a romantic couple?

In 1938 Hepburn was included in a list of performers who were considered 'Box Office Poison' by a group of film exhibitors, and there was an immediate reaction where stars on this list tried to change their image. The remote and glamorous Greta Garbo laughed in *Ninotchka* (1939). The even more remote and glamorous Marlene Dietrich became an animated barroom floozy in *Destry Rides Again* (1939). And Hepburn had to come down off her high horse in *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), a vehicle written specifically for her by Philip Barry, who had observed her in career limbo

LISTOMANIA INSECTS

Horror and sci-fi films teem with terrifying insects; animation's history is full of anthropomorphised bugs. But just as in Peter Strickland's *The Duke of Burgundy*, insects can play a prominent role in other film genres.

- 1 **Once upon a Time (1944)**
Alexander Hall
- 2 **The Insect Woman (1963)**
Imamura Shohei
- 3 **Mothlight (1963)**
Stan Brakhage
- 4 **Woman in the Dunes (1964)**
Teshigahara Hiroshi
- 5 **The Beekeeper (1986)**
Theo Angelopoulos
- 6 **The Silence of the Lambs (1991)**
Jonathan Demme
- 7 **Angels and Insects (1995, pictured)**
Philip Haas
- 8 **Microcosmos (1996)**
Claude Nuridsany, Marie Pérennou
- 9 **Butterfly's Tongue (1999)**
José Luis Cuerda
- 10 **The Wonders (2014)**
Alice Rohrwacher



QUOTE OF THE MONTH VERA CHYTILOVA

'I have no desire to cuddle my audience'

A season of Vera Chytilová's films takes place from 1–17 March at BFI Southbank, London



i The Katharine Hepburn season runs at BFI Southbank, London, until 19 March



Stars and bars: Hepburn and Cary Grant in *Bringing Up Baby* (1938)

that summer of 1938. She did it on stage first with Joseph Cotten as her husband C.K. Dexter Haven and Van Heflin as reporter Mike Connor. Hepburn played Tracy Lord, an heiress who needs to learn some humility, some respect for other people's frailties. Or at least that's what Barry's script tells us and keeps telling us.

The George Cukor movie of *The Philadelphia Story* has been subjected to much criticism in recent years because the set-up against Tracy feels unfair, particularly the scene where her father Seth (John Halliday) tells Tracy that if she had been an uncritically adoring daughter he would not have felt the need to have an affair with a young dancer. The movie would play far better without the overreach of this "say what?" sexist scene. And it would also play better if we could see some of Tracy's intolerance in behaviour rather than just hearing about it in dialogue from others.

So why does *The Philadelphia Story* remain a very rewatchable classic? Because Hepburn and Cukor steer you past the rocks in the material and into the gorgeous blue waters of the long

drunk sequence that Hepburn's Tracy shares with James Stewart's Mike. Cukor believed in drunkenness as a kind of liberation; it's an idea that runs through nearly all his films. And the drunkenness here makes Hepburn what she had never quite been before on screen: sexy in a conventional way, or at least interested in sex. And also supernally lovely, a snooty-voiced character, yes, but only highfalutin' in order to hide her outsized vulnerability and her insecurity.

An outsider and a rebel in most ways, Hepburn also wanted to be loved, to be included, and in acting that out in *The Philadelphia Story*, a play that is rarely revived, she is still very moving and funny because outsiders often long to be insiders just as insiders often long to be rebels, and it is in that tricky area of longing that Hepburn operates most potently as a screen presence, whispering to Stewart, "Put me in your pocket, Mike," before running off to take a midnight swim and throw most caution to the winds. ☀



Glasgow Film Festival

Glasgow has grown steadily into one of the UK's most lively and enticing film festivals. This year's edition (18 February–1 March) opens with Noah Baumbach's bittersweet comedy 'While We're Young' (right) and has pop-up cinemas galore (including a roller-disco screening of Linklater's 'Dazed and Confused'), a centenary tribute to Ingrid Bergman and even a mini-festival dedicated to internet cat videos.



Jem Cohen

The Brooklyn-based filmmaker has made more than 70 films over three decades, working at the edge of many genres and forms (music films, city films, essay and diary films, documentary and fiction). A long-overdue full UK retrospective, including Cohen's most recent multi-city film 'Counting', which premieres in Berlin, will take place at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, in April and May, with further screenings and events at the Barbican and Hackney Picturehouse.

TOM-TOM CLUB



The little drummer boy: David Bennent as Oskar in *The Tin Drum* (1979)

Immaturity, primal urges, sex, rigour, race – all sorts of ideas about manhood are snared up in the sound of a drum



By Hannah McGill

At his birth, Oskar, protagonist of *The Tin Drum* (1979), hears his mother promise that he shall receive the titular instrument as a gift

when he is three years old. "Only the promise of a tin drum prevented me from wishing to return to the womb," Oskar reports. "I could hardly wait for my third birthday." That age achieved, and the drum in his possession, Oskar decides he's seen enough of adult life – and of his boorish father in particular – not to want to experience it, and by throwing himself down the stairs, succeeds in stunting his own growth. Born in the wake of World War I, he stays the size of a three-year-old throughout the rise of Nazism and the onslaught of another war. During it all, he remains fiercely attached to his drum. But the drum is no straightforward symbol of childhood innocence, like Charles Foster Kane's Rosebud. It is disruptive; responsive to and redolent of adult violence and adult sexual rhythms; a spur for trouble as well as a talisman against it.

Men who can't or won't grow up in cinema

tend either to be tender and naive, like the protagonists of *Forrest Gump* (1994), *I Am Sam* (2001) and *Tim* (1979), or irresponsible and irrepressible, like the characters played by Adam Sandler or the opted-out stoner manchildren who await sorting out by a woman in comedies from the Judd Apatow stable. They embody the more socially acceptable characteristics whereby most children are differentiated from adults: vulnerability, sweetness, naughtiness. Oskar, by contrast, embodies the feral side of children, the part that must be concealed if they are to be successfully sentimentalised: unchecked aggression, utter self-interest, the untrammelled id. With his drum and his scream – which can shatter glass – he successfully manipulates the adults around him, threatening first their peace of mind and then their material objects. "Whenever

my drum was taken away, I screamed," Oskar says, "and whenever I screamed, valuable things broke." He simply rejects adult authority and approval, thus confounding a society that expects children not only to obey it, but also to want to grow up and join it. Yet his behaviour is not only a rebellion; it points up aspects of the way German society is operating. Oskar's behaviour is a fairground mirror reflection not just of the Hitler Youth – whose parade he subverts by throwing their rhythm off with his drumming – but of Nazism itself: heraldic pomp to stir the public's emotions, ever-present threat to keep it in line.

The combination within the practice of drumming of mechanical discipline and inspired, unruly self-expression – a meeting of the primal and the prim, of disobedience and obedience – occurs elsewhere in cinema, most



Miles Teller in *Whiplash*



Fred Astaire goes 'Drum Crazy' in *Easter Parade*

OPERA FILMS

recently in the much-admired *Whiplash*. This tale of the harsh dynamic between a budding jazz drummer and his teacher confronts the idea of the artist as unfettered, dreamy outsider by emphasising the role of incessant practice and near-sadistic authoritarian pressure in creating a creator. Films about drummers where they're not presented merely as the bottom of the rock 'n' roll food chain, as in *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984), draw out the clash between wild bohemian tendencies and obsessive creative rigour. Drugs and infidelity tempt the fireball protagonist of *The Gene Krupa Story* (1959); drugs, infidelity and a generalised aggression towards other people power the subject of *Beware of Mr. Baker* (2012). The number 'Drum Crazy' from *Easter Parade* (1948) sees even the dapper Fred Astaire claim to be turned "into a loon" by the beat of a drum – though the claim is cast into some doubt by the rigorous choreography that accompanies it, and the whole performance is a trick to capture the attention of a young boy and part him from the stuffed bunny that Astaire's character wants to buy for his sweetheart.

Fiercer male competition and a less romantic ploy drive Neil LaBute's PC-baiting bad-behaviour drama *In the Company of Men* (1997), in which drums aren't seen, but are prominent on the soundtrack. Again, the suggestion is of activity

Films about drummers draw out the clash between wild, bohemian tendencies and obsessive creative rigour

at once highly deliberate and dangerously, anti-socially instinctive: this time, the deliberate seduction and rejection of a vulnerable woman by two men, Chad (Aaron Eckhart) and Howard (Matt Molloy), who are interested in cruelty for its own sake. The juxtaposition of African tribal rhythms with a predominantly white, formal office environment creates an uncomfortable racial dynamic, which is underscored by some of LaBute's comments about the film: "Just underneath those white shirts they're in the jungle," he said of his white male characters at the time of the film's release. And in LaBute's mocking vision a male associated with "the jungle" is primitive, animalistic, sexually predatory, threateningly sexually effective. Could it be Chad's drum-crazy jungle self or his insecure, white-shirted, white self that drives him to humiliate a black colleague by making him expose his genitals? Contrast this with Thomas McCarthy's *The Visitor* (2007), in which Walter Vale, a widowed economics professor, finds Syrian drummer Tarek Khalil and girlfriend Zainab living in his rarely used New York apartment and lets them stay. Walter becomes fascinated by Tarek's drum, learns to play it and finds a kind of late solace.

Whether or not it's presented as a racially charged matter, rhythm and its creation are associated with intense feelings – *in utero* awareness of the mother's heartbeat, the sexual impulse, the excitement and horror of war – and as such, are perhaps only ever a few beats away from madness. ☀

As Powell and Pressburger's newly restored *The Tales of Hoffmann* is rereleased in UK cinemas, we consider the best operas on screen

By David Thompson

Cinemas worldwide are enjoying a box-office bonanza with live relays from international opera houses, filmed within the proscenium arch to preserve a sense of theatre. But there is also a bastard genre of 'opera films', mixing cinema aesthetics and this most artificial artform. In particular, Italy and the USSR regularly produced filmed opera, shot in real locations with singers lip-synching to a recording. US cinema has tried such experiments as *The Medium* (opera as film noir) and *Carmen Jones* (opera as American musical). Here are five titles that have made their mark as persuasive artistic fusions, including *The Tales of Hoffmann*, which is rereleased in UK cinemas from 27 February.



2 The Tales of Hoffmann (1951)

After *The Red Shoes*, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger decided to present Offenbach's fantastical work as a bold synthesis of film, opera and ballet. Only two actual singers play their roles; other parts are danced by such stars of the British ballet as Moira Shearer and Robert Helpmann. The dynamic use of colour, editing, variable film speeds and lighting effects inspired both Scorsese and George A. Romero.



4 Don Giovanni (1979)

First in a line of French-produced film operas (including Rosi's *Carmen* and Jacquot's *Tosca*), Mozart's dark comedy about the great seducer is transported by Joseph Losey to Venice locations. In his quest for filmic veracity, Losey had his cast lip-synch their arias but speak their recitatives live, though he lost his battle – fortunately – to vary the audio perspective as the singers moved about.



1 The Bartered Bride (1932)

The coming of sound to cinema resulted in a plethora of musicals, a classic version of Brecht and Weill's *The Threepenny Opera*, and this joyous German film of Smetana's ever-popular opera, directed by Max Ophuls. Despite obvious technical limitations, Ophuls wove his visual magic, building an entire village in the studio, and working with a mixed Czech and German cast (including Max 'Nosferatu' Schreck).



3 The Magic Flute (1975)

Ingmar Bergman's favourite opera – creepily referenced in *Hour of the Wolf* – was an obvious choice for him to film, with its enchanted world of low comedy and high ideals. Bergman cast photogenic singers and placed Mozart's opera in a studio recreation of the baroque Drottningholm Palace Theatre, incorporating charmingly archaic scenic effects to approximate the look of the first performance in 1791.



5 The Death of Klinghoffer (2003)

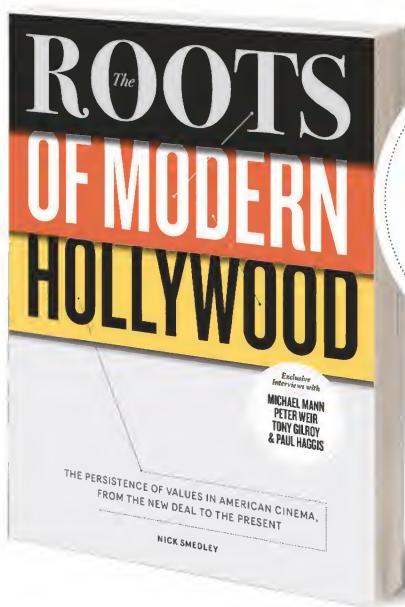
Director Penny Woolcock worked closely with composer John Adams to film his controversial opera about the true-life hijacking of a liner by Palestinian terrorists, during which a Jewish-American passenger was killed. As well as having the cast sing live on camera and shooting the main action in the Mediterranean, Woolcock added flashbacks blending real and faked archive to give backstories to the characters.



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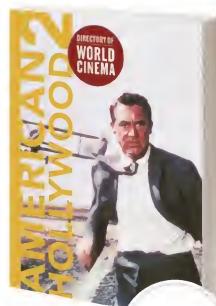
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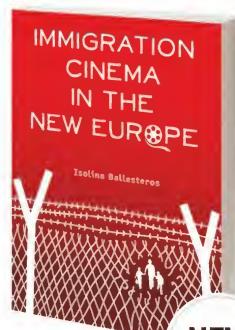


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WEIRD SCIENCE

James Ward Byrkit explains the challenge of balancing improvised dialogue with a tightly defined plot in his reality-bending debut *Coherence*

By Sam Davies

A comet passes over a Californian suburb; mobile phone screens mysteriously crack; the power goes out. This is the backdrop for a dinner party of old friends in *Coherence*, in which the guests begin to realise that the cracks seem to be spreading through reality itself. Shot on two handheld cameras and without a script, *Coherence* is the directorial debut of James Ward Byrkit, previously a storyboard artist for the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series and one of the writers of *Rango* (2011).

Sam Davies: Did you grow up a science-fiction fan?

JWB: Yeah, I was raised in Flagstaff, Arizona, a mountain town, 7,000 feet up in the pine trees, about an hour from the Grand Canyon. I grew up at the bottom of a hill called Mars Hill, because there was an observatory on Mars Hill where Percival Lowell mapped the canals of Mars – what he thought were the canals of Mars.

SD: Your route into Hollywood was working as a storyboard artist?

JWB: When I first got out of school that was how I earned a living and sort of supported my own directing habit, by storyboarding during the day. I'd get my friends together evenings and weekends to work on crazy experiments.

SD: Storyboarding is a way of mapping out a film, but how much was *Coherence* mapped out?

JWB: It's completely improvised dialogue, it's completely non-storyboarded – it's the opposite of a storyboarded movie. But the story beats, the puzzle of it all, the character arcs, those were all very plotted out for a year, between me and my cohort, Alex Manugian, who is Amir in the film. I had a theory for a long time, that if you have your story figured out immaculately, then it really doesn't matter what the words are, what the actors say. And in an ensemble piece, I would much rather have it be natural dialogue than written.

SD: You could watch *Coherence* in the context of recent low-budget science fiction, or 'locked room' thrillers, but what about the dinner party sub-genre?

JWB: For sure, I didn't reference specific films but the tropes of the dinner party film are exactly what *Coherence* is. This idea that goes back to movies like *Ten Little Indians* – a civilised meal of mostly strangers, attractive, well-off strangers, that then are subjected to a night of mystery where on the surface everything is still civilised but their inner lives are deteriorating. That was the game, almost like you're playing Cluedo or something like that. That's why we have little items that you track through the movie, like game or puzzle pieces, because it's supposed to evoke that sense of a very controlled mystery. And the contrast between a completely controlled mystery and a completely uncontrolled improvisation.

SD: There must have been a tension between getting the film in the can and the danger with improv of the actors veering off your plotted course?



James Ward Byrkit: 'I had no intention of making a scientifically solid film'

JWB: All the time. The challenge for me was I had to resist stopping them because if you tell your actors the game is, "I'm going to allow you to do whatever you feel, whatever's natural," you have to honour your end of the deal. Sometimes I'd let it run for 30 minutes just to let them get it out of their systems. And sometimes a scene was worthless, but a shot or two or some great reaction or line was perfect. I had this incredible editor who just looked at everything and could piece together scenes from radically different threads of reality and make them all look like the same scene.

SD: And it seems like the competing realities of quantum mechanics in the film work well as a metaphor for drafting or editing, where multiple iterations have to be killed off for the final cut?

JWB: And the creative process in general. Every time you think of something, you go down that thread and test it out and see how it's going to be. Hopefully there's a wider metaphor because every

We have items you track through the movie, like puzzle pieces, because it's supposed to evoke that sense of a very controlled mystery



Emily Foxler and Maury Sterling in *Coherence*

time in life you make some micro-decision you don't know if it's going to be life-changing or not.

SD: There's been a run of films recently that play with the idea of meeting your double – or in *Coherence*, your triple, or quadruple... Why do you think they all tend to resolve in violence? Why is it so disturbing?

JWB: Yeah! You make a movie and some of the fun is how you're dealing with previous versions of the same idea. The audience wants you to acknowledge what's been done before so they can see how you diverge and create your own thing. So we nodded to that, we said OK, if that's something people are scared of were going to acknowledge that, we're going to have our lead character [played by Emily Foxler] say, "I'm not afraid of that at all." She actually makes this great speech that maybe this is a great thing, maybe this is a moment for enlightenment. But when we come down to it, our own instincts for self-preservation – that's the stronger metaphor. So this is a movie about characters who are in conflict with themselves, who need to forgive themselves. And conflict is going to arise when you think that there's a better version of yourself out there.

SD: So ultimately you only needed the science to set up those conflicts?

JWB: I don't even think of this as a science-fiction movie. It's a fantasy movie. *The Twilight Zone* never explains why or how the zone exists, it's about the character choices within this zone. A real science-fiction film to me would be *Gattaca* – it postulates something that's scientifically possible, and then it really runs that course. Most films that are considered science fiction aren't really, they're fantasy movies. We did a lot research just for fun, just to see if we could throw in terms and issues like quantum decoherence, but I had no intention at all to make a scientifically solid film. ☺

i Coherence is released in UK cinemas on 13 February and is reviewed on page 71



"The film combines the muscular force of a Forsythian thriller with something purely eerie, static and atmospheric." Peter Bradshaw -The Guardian

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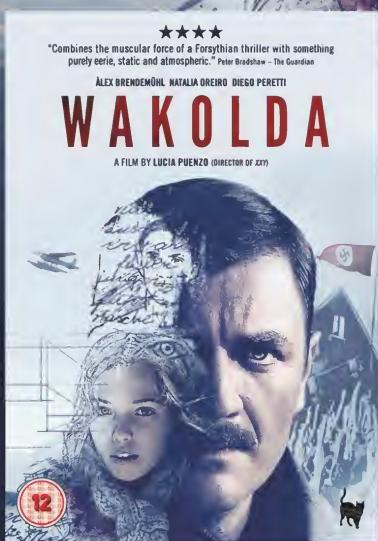
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THE TEST OF TIME

Can the sadness of our times make us overlook great film-making? Do we do much better with hindsight?



By Mark Cousins

In December, critics and tweeters provided us with their lists of best films of the year. As I read them, I wondered how much the events

of the past 12 months had influenced the choices, and whether the lists were too serious. None of my top four (*Frank*, *Ida*, *Snowpiercer*, *Under the Skin*) were blockbusters. Does living through the sadness of world events make entertainment films seem, at the time, too trivial?

I ask this because I caught the second half of the Gene Kelly-Stanley Donen musical *On the Town* on TV at Christmas, and loved it. It was maybe my tenth time seeing it. As its credits rolled, I wondered whether, had I been alive in 1949, I would have liked it as much. 1949 was the year that Germany was divided, Mao proclaimed China communist, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published, and the USSR tested an A-bomb. *On the Town* is oblivious to all this. Would Gene Kelly's flawless face, Vera-Ellen's tiny waist and Jules Munshin's child-man have seemed, against such real-life events, naive or even wilfully unengaged with the world?

In the same year, Elia Kazan's *Pinky* was about a light-skinned black woman in the US passing as white and William Wellman's *Battleground* was one of the great American war films. Might I have preferred them? Might their relevance to the life around me made them look like better art? I fear the answers to these questions are yes. Add in *On the Town*'s dodgy jokes about the "ugly" girl (Alice Pearce, brilliant as Lucy Schmeeler) and I might have gone for *Pinky*'s bravery over the Donen-Kelly film's indifference to change.

And yet I'm not a film snob (two more of my 2014 favourites were *Paddington* and *Interstellar*), and would, I think, even on its release, have loved *On the Town*'s abandon, its teamwork, and its commitment to generic change. Its switches between studio and street make it zippy and new. Its joy has context (the three guys in town for 24 hours are sailors, who might well have seen action in the Pacific just a few years previously). So it has contrast, and bitterness is just off screen. And on TV in December in 2014, 65 years after it was made, its context was cheap Christmas TV, not the events of 1949; relocated, it looked crisp, inventive and burnished. My conclusions that December afternoon were that I shouldn't necessarily look for now in new films, and (I think I knew this anyway) that Hollywood could and can make the best of films.

But this morning, for this article, I looked up what else was released in 1949. Deep breath: *The Third Man*, *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, *Whisky Galore!* and Powell and Pressburger's *The Small Back Room* in the UK; Tati's *Jour de fête*, Franju's *Le Sang des bêtes* and Melville's *Le Silence de la mer* in France; in the US, Mark Robson's



The year 1949 isn't often thought of as a vintage one for cinema, yet these great films make me jealous of those who were alive then

Champion, Hitchcock's *Under Capricorn*, *White Heat*, Siodmak's *Criss Cross*, Cukor's *Adam's Rib*, Hawks's *I Was a Male War Bride*, Anthony Mann's *Border Incident*, Max Ophuls's *The Reckless Moment*, Nicholas Ray's *They Live by Night*, John Ford's *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, Mankiewicz's *A Letter to Three Wives*, and Jules Dassin's *Thieves' Highway*; in Italy, *Bitter Rice* and Pietro Germi's *In the Name of the Law*; in Argentina, Carlos Schlieper's *Fascination*; in Japan, Ozu's *Late Spring* and Kurosawa's *Stray Dog*; in Mexico, *Salón México* by Emilio Fernández; Greece's *Youth of Athens*, directed by Takis Bakopoulos; *Crows and Sparrows*, directed by Zheng Junli in China; and, finally, three great Indian films, *Andaz* by Mehboob Khan, Bimal Roy's *Mantramugdhu* and Raj Kapoor's *Barsaat*.

The year 1949 isn't often thought of as a vintage one for cinema, yet these 30 great films make me jealous of those who were alive then. Of course, due to the fact that film distribution then was parochial and, in the West, an Anglo game, it's almost certain that not a single person on earth saw all of them at the time.

And let's go back to context. If *On the Town* might have seemed oblivious to its sociopolitical times, and looked joyous and jewelled to me in December, set it among the films I list above

and something else happens. Many of the great movies of 1949 – especially the Argentinian, Greek and Indian ones – have been forgotten, in the English-speaking world at least. We can come up with reasons to explain this – lack of availability of good prints, lack of subtitles, etc – but among those reasons is our own lack of interest. Raj Kapoor's film is as entertaining as *On the Town*. Silvana Mangano in *Bitter Rice* is as beautiful as Gene Kelly. *Late Spring* is as about the moment as *On the Town*.

And so I begin to change my December conclusions. When I saw *On the Town* again on TV, I was glad that time had, by canonising it, been wiser than I might have been. And yet many great films from the same year haven't been remembered. I'm still glad that *On the Town* is shown and loved, but I wish one of the other 1949 films had been shown instead, or as well. With all our digital TV channels, would it not be possible for one, for example, to commit its 2015 Christmas schedule to showing only movies from 60 years ago? *Love Me or Leave Me*, *Les Diaboliques*, *Marty*, *Summer Madness*, *The Seven Year Itch*, *The Night of the Hunter*, *Lola Montés*, Trnka's *The Good Soldier Schweik*, Bergman's *Smiles of a Summer's Night*, Bimal Roy's *Devdas*, Amar Kumar's *Garam Coat*, Guru Dutt's *Mr & Mrs '55*, Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali*, Naruse's *Floating Clouds*, and Gavaldón's *After the Storm* were all made in 1955. Another great year.

Films like *On the Town* work well out of time, but the annual context shows the blindness and forgetting of movie history.

@markcousinsfilm

DEVELOPMENT TALE

STILL ALICE



Ingredients for success: Julianne Moore plays a 50-year-old academic with early-onset Alzheimer's in *Still Alice*, with Kristen Stewart as her daughter

Alzheimer's drama *Still Alice* faced its own medical emergency when one of its directors was diagnosed with motor neurone disease

By Charles Gant

Visiting family in March 2011, producer James Brown asked his "voracious reader" sister what she'd read recently that would make a great film. Her reply: Lisa Genova's *Still Alice*, concerning a 50-year-old female academic suffering from early-onset Alzheimer's disease.

Recalls Brown: "I had that knee-jerk cynical film-industry response. Because, at that time, nobody was interested in the older female audience. One chapter in, I was, 'OK, against all rhyme, reason, logic, anything the industry would say, I feel this is something I should do.'"

Back in London, Brown gave the book to his producer partner Lex Lutzus, who responded in kind, and they set about acquiring the underlying rights. But given that the pair wasn't blessed with a fund to acquire material ("The discretionary fund is known as the HSBC bank personal loan department," says Brown), they could only act when they were ready to move forward on the adaptation. Lutzus explains, "You don't want to be not knowing who's writing and directing something, and paying options year on year as you look around."

Meanwhile, in Los Angeles, the filmmaking duo Wash Westmoreland and Richard Glatzer were considering their next move. Their last film as directors had been 2006 Sundance winner *Quinceañera* (aka *Echo Park, LA*), and they'd been struggling for years to make what they call their "working-class vampire movie", set in Newcastle upon Tyne: *Hello Darkness*. Leeds-born Westmoreland says, "When a film doesn't go, nobody gives you a silver medal and says you can win second. It's: 'What did you do with the last four years?'"

Also in 2011, Glatzer, who is American, was diagnosed with the incurable muscle-wasting disease ALS – known in the UK as motor neurone disease. "We went back to the States just feeling like the world was coming to an end," Westmoreland says. But they were not ready to give up. "I was like, 'What do you want to do? We could sell our house and travel around the world.' He was: 'I want to make movies.' Yeah, so do I, but we've been trying for years, without success, to make a movie." He was like, 'I don't care.'"

While trying to make *Hello Darkness*, the pair had been introduced to Brown and Lutzus; and although a deal never came together, the four of them clicked. The filmmakers were not at the hottest phase of their career, yet Brown and Lutzus were clear they were the right team for *Still Alice*. Says Brown: "Our position was: 'If you will do this, we will buy this book. If you will not do it, we won't buy it.'"

Westmoreland picks up the story. "Initially we were a little reticent with the subject matter. We'd spent the whole year dealing with doctors and clinics... with Richard's condition. We thought, this is a great project, but did it have to happen now? Then we realised, maybe this is the perfect thing for us to work on now, because there is such a close association between what Richard was going through and what Alice goes through."

As the ALS progressed, the filmmakers explained the situation to their London producers. Says Brown, "We had no idea. It was three months into the process, we were on a conference call, and we noticed that Richard's voice was badly affected. We got off the call and thought: what's going on? Wash called us and told us. It really clarified [things]. We took very seriously our responsibility to see it through on Richard's behalf. It's a story that obviously came to Richard for a reason that's bigger than us and bigger than the movie."

However, after delivering early drafts of *Still Alice* in spring 2012, another film project, *The Last of Robin Hood*, was suddenly coming together for Glatzer and Westmoreland. That film also boasted a key female role – the mother of a teen starlet who has a scandalous affair with Errol Flynn in 1957 – and they'd been wooing Julianne Moore. Says Westmoreland, "Immediately we thought, she'd be the perfect Alice, but we didn't want to cross the streams." Eventually, Moore passed and the role went to Susan Sarandon.

THE NUMBERS OSCAR CONTENDERS

"Then we wrote to Julianne and said, 'Well, we have another project!' It took her a long time to pass on *The Last of Robin Hood*, but her response on *Still Alice* was immediate. Within two days we were on Skype, and it was: 'I love this, I'm in.' By the time the directors met their star face to face, Glatzer was speaking by typing into an iPad. (Having lost the use of his fingers, he now uses one toe.)

In autumn 2012 Brown was at the Toronto film festival, trying to finance the film. A sea change had occurred. "The year before, when we'd just bought the book, all the buyers told me I was completely insane, and spending my own money pursuing that was the most ludicrous thing in the world." But in spring 2012, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* and *The Iron Lady* delivered a combined \$250 million global box office. Brown says, "It had been proven that this was an under-served audience rather than one that didn't exist. It was incredibly lucky timing for us."

More pieces fell into place. Christine Vachon and Pam Koffler from New York-based Killer Films came on board to beef up the producer side, especially since Brown and Lutzus's only credit had been a WWII action title for the DVD market. Kristen Stewart signed on to play Moore's daughter, and Alec Baldwin as the husband. Financing came from a single French source, introduced to the producers by Moore's agents, CAA.

When a film doesn't go, nobody gives you a silver medal and says you can win second. It's: 'What did you do with the last four years?'

In June 2013, rumours surfaced that Moore was set to join the final two *Hunger Games* movies. Says Lutzus, "*Hunger Games* clashed with our dates... but Julianne was so passionate about the project, and the *Hunger Games* producers were good enough to carve out five weeks to do *Still Alice*. By the skin of our teeth, we managed to squeeze in there."

Glatzer had got sick one very long, very cold shooting day on *The Last of Robin Hood*, and so stayed in Los Angeles for pre-production on *Still Alice* in early, wintry 2014. "When he came out to New York, a lot of the motor function in his arms had gone," says Westmoreland. "He was unable to do stuff for himself: dressing, eating, teeth cleaning. We had to adjust to all his new care needs, while we were going into this very demanding work schedule on the film."

In late summer, they were in the final phases of post-production. "We went back to New York to finish the film for the New York tax credit: sound mix, colour correct and so on. It was getting really tough on Richard. We couldn't use the subway any more, he couldn't do the steps. Then he was hospitalised with a breathing difficulty. He was in the intensive care unit in Brooklyn, and they wanted to do a tracheotomy on him. I was trying to finish the movie for Toronto... Our daughter Ruby came out to look after him, and we were able to finish the film within a day of our deadline." ☀

i *Still Alice* opens in the UK on 6 March and is reviewed on page 89

By Charles Gant

Every year, independent cinema bookers complain that distributors' desire to position prestige dramas in January and early February, thereby taking maximum advantage of awards nominations, creates an impossible logjam on their screens. And cinema-goers also wonder if the annual binge of quality viewing might not be better enjoyed spread over a longer period. In 2015, such concerns have been, as usual, thoroughly ignored.

Beginning the first week of January with *The Theory of Everything* and *Birdman*; following a week later with *Foxcatcher* and *Into the Woods*; then the week after with *Whiplash*, *Wild*, *American Sniper* and *Testament of Youth*; and finally slowing down towards the end of the awards corridor with *A Most Violent Year*, *Inherent Vice*, *Selma* and *Love Is Strange*: a six-week period has seen 12 films competing, if not exactly for the same audience, then for audiences who are highly adjacent and often overlapping.

Among the nine films nominated for either Best Picture or Director (see chart, below) there are no misfires to rank alongside last year's *Nebraska*, an Oscar Best Picture nominee that grossed just £674,000 in UK cinemas. On the other hand, there hasn't been anything to match last year's Oscar blockbuster *Gravity* (£32.7 million), and it remains to be seen how *The Theory of Everything*—very likely to be the biggest UK hit among this year's awards flicks—will measure up to *The Wolf of Wall Street* (£22.7 million) and *12 Years a Slave* (£20 million).

For Jason Wood, departing chief booker for Curzon Cinemas, it's been "a really, really good awards season. Most of our money last year came from one or two films. This year, it's been three or four, which is really healthy." *The Imitation Game*, holding up very strongly in its third month of play, "just doesn't go away," says Wood. With regard to his sites, the casualties have been *Into the Woods*, which he has barely managed to play ("much to Disney's chagrin") and *Foxcatcher*, which went to matinees-only at the Curzon Soho after just one week.

"We played *Foxcatcher* quite widely, certainly in the West End," says Wood. "Soho, it did very



The Theory of Everything



Birdman: or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)

respectable business, it did a £10,000 opening weekend. But when you've got *Birdman* taking £18,000 over the same period; you've got *The Theory of Everything* doing £12,000; you've got *Wild*, *Whiplash* doing well—*Foxcatcher* just wasn't able to compete. It's a great shame, because it's a tremendous piece of filmmaking."

At the Monday 'holdover' sessions, at which exhibitors look at the weekend numbers and confirm bookings for the following weekend, passions have been suitably high. "Monday morning, all the distributors are having to fight really hard for their pictures," says Wood. "They know there's going to be other pictures coming in. They know they're going to be squeezed. It just becomes really difficult for those films to have the presence that they deserve." ☀

2015 OSCAR CONTENDERS AT US AND UK BOX OFFICE

| Film | US gross | UK gross |
|--------------------------|----------|----------------|
| American Sniper | \$200m | £6.61m |
| The Imitation Game | \$60.6m | £15.5m |
| The Grand Budapest Hotel | \$59.1m | £11.2m |
| Selma | \$39.2m | Released 6 Feb |
| Birdman | \$30.9m | £4.66m |
| Boyhood | \$24.9m | £3.03m |
| The Theory of Everything | \$20.1m | £14.7m |
| Foxcatcher | \$11.0m | £1.97m |
| Whiplash | \$7.60m | £1.28m |

Films nominated for Best Picture and/or Director. Grosses at 26 January

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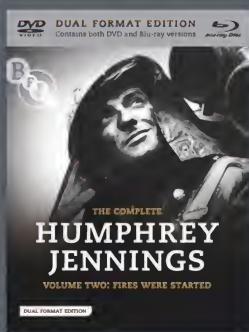
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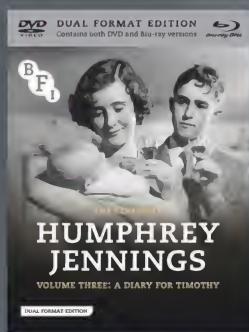
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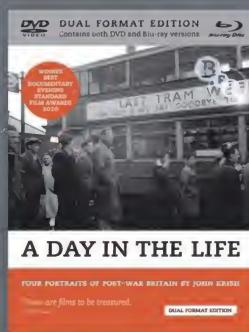
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FAMILY AFFAIRS

BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

The rewards are undeniably great, but mounting successful family films with medium-sized budgets is never an easy thing to do



By Ben Roberts

It looks as if StudioCanal's move into the family film market is working out pretty sweetly, with £35 million and counting

for *Paddington*, and Aardman's *Shaun the Sheep: The Movie* about to jump the gate and into cinemas.

Good for StudioCanal. Cracking the family film nut – and particularly cracking the British family film in the wake of Harry Potter – isn't easy. I know because we've been trying. We've always been under pressure to get more films for children and families off the ground, and get lobbied harder on this than anything else.

The last time I wrote about this we were committing ourselves to three projects with potential, and all of them are now complete: Chris Smith's *Get Santa*, Jon Wright's *Robot Overlords* and apocryphal Shakespeare comedy *Bill*.

So, first a status report. *Get Santa* was released by Warner Bros in December into a horribly crowded market. Reviews were mostly decent and it wheezed its way to about £2.5 million. It should have a good shelf life but really should have done better.

Robot Overlords was made without a UK distributor in place – always a risk – and financed by a big investment from Pinewood and a relatively small amount from us, and it has struggled to find one since the summer. It is now getting a medium-sized release through Vue cinemas in March and should find a subsequent audience on Sky and DVD.

Bill is the most likely of the trio to succeed. Funny, extremely likeable, beautifully shot by Ben Wheatley's regular DP Laurie Rose to look much more expensive than its budget, it also has a committed distributor in Koch and can trade off the appeal of the *Horrible Histories* cast from TV.

Here are some of the conclusions we've drawn from our experiences with these films:

1 They cost a lot to make (unless you're Debbie Isitt) Each of the films costs between £4 million and £8 million, and all of them needed more – but the market isn't set up to finance them to a much greater level, particularly if their primary audience is likely to be in the UK.

By contrast *Paddington* and *Shaun* were made on three or four times these budgets. They needed and found a deep-pocketed financier, and StudioCanal is set up to sell rights internationally as well as to release the films in the UK. Sadly, there aren't enough StudioCanal-sized

The shining example of a filmmaker who has managed to find an audience without breaking the bank is Debbie Isitt



Taking centre stage: *Bill*

distributors to go around, beyond Lionsgate and eOne (which are betting big on Spielberg's *BFG*).

The shining example of a filmmaker who has managed to find an audience without breaking the bank is Debbie Isitt, whose popular *Nativity* films have made up for in charm what they lack in onscreen 'value'. The first *Nativity* film didn't cost much more than £2 million.

2 The devil is in the detail (and detail costs money) We struggled to get enough production value on screen in each of the three films, whether that was getting enough coverage or enough action, finding time to nail the jokes, or finding extra texture in the detail of the production design. It's the kind of texture that makes its way into trailers and TV ads, and can suggest a film is less than the sum of its parts where it's absent. Paul King's work on *Paddington* is exemplary in its detail and design, but it comes at a price.

3 Know your audience One of the difficulties of the family and children's market is that it can be captured with broad strokes, but if it's pitched off-centre a film can miss the mark. *Robot Overlords* was originally written with a much younger set of characters in the lead roles, and I wonder whether, in ageing the boys, it shifted itself too much into the teenage market when its heart lay with children under ten.

4 Find a committed distributor, or don't bother *Bill* is very lucky to have Koch, which has been building up awareness for the film since dating the film on release calendars before it went into production. I suspect Warners struggled to juggle the needs of *Get Santa* with the demands of releasing *The Hobbit* a few weeks later. Expecting a distributor to come on board a film like *Robot Overlords* after it had been shot and delivered was too ambitious; it can take a year of planning the release of a film like this for it to compete with studio titles.

All of the above is at the front of our minds on other titles we're developing. To the lobby groups who want us to return to a time of the Children's Film Foundation, I'd say that that ship has sailed. But there is clearly a big appetite for good-natured 21st-century British family films that have strong, simple messages for children about inclusivity, creativity, family and friendship. Filmmaking for family audiences can be a grossly expensive business, but the rewards can be great, so good for Heyday, Aardman and StudioCanal for making a success of it. @bfiben

i *Bill* is released in UK cinemas on 27 March and is reviewed on page 69

IN PRODUCTION

● **Andrzej Zulawski** is in post-production on an adaptation of Polish author Witold Gombrowicz's novel *Cosmos*. Described as a "metaphysical noir thriller", the film follows two friends who stop at a rural guesthouse run by a retired couple and become obsessed with the couple's maid and daughter. The film is produced by Paolo Branco, and is the great Polish director's first since 2000's *La Fidélité*.

● **James Marsh** is to follow *The Theory of Everything* with another film about a real-life British character – the yachtsman Donald Crowhurst. Colin Firth is to play Crowhurst, the amateur sailor who disappeared while competing in a single-handed round-the-world yacht race in 1969, leaving behind a journal that revealed a record of deception and mental breakdown.

● **Ulrich Seidl**, the Austrian director of *Dog Days* and last year's *In the Basement*, has announced that his next project will be *Herr Grasl*, a historical drama set in "the milieu of the poorest of the poor" in 18th-century Austria. Grasl was a real-life Robin Hood figure, finally hanged by the authorities aged only 26.

● **Jay and Mark Duplass** have agreed a four-film deal with Netflix, following the online-streaming giant's earlier announcement that it had signed Adam Sandler on a similar four-film contract. The deal with the brothers, whose *Togetherness* is currently on HBO, and who are either producing, starring in or directing a host of other projects, is an indication of Netflix's intentions in the theatrical market. It follows the news that Amazon will also produce 12 original films per year, which will then be streamed on its Prime Instant Video service eight weeks after playing in cinemas.

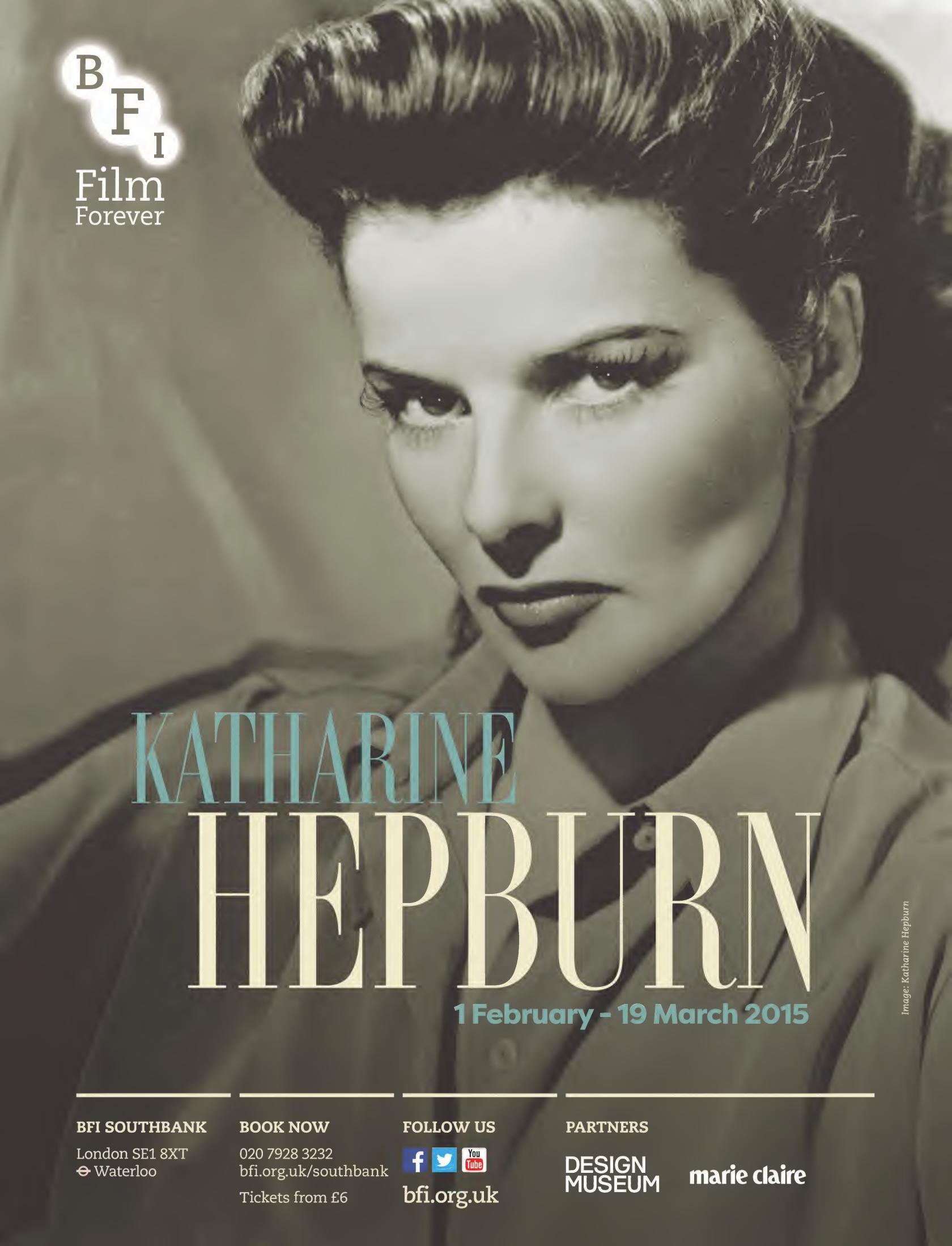


● **Lucrecia Martel** (above), the Argentinian director of *La ciénaga*, *La niña santa* and *The Headless Woman*, is at work on her first dramatic feature since 2008. Entitled *Zama*, the film is an adaptation of a 1956 novel by Argentinian author Antonio di Benedetto, about the mental decline of a Spanish official in Paraguay in the late 18th century.

● **Woody Allen** is to direct his first ever TV series, for Amazon Studios. Currently known only as 'Untitled Woody Allen Project', it will be written and directed by Allen, and each episode will run for half an hour. Amazon is increasingly competitive in producing original series; last year's *Transparent* picked up two Golden Globes, and this year it has, among several others, an original series by Steven Soderbergh.

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Festivals

SUNDANCE

PARK CITY LIGHTS

Despite its reputation as a magnet for predictable indie fare, the festival saw a handful of films that might just rank among the best of the year

By Vadim Rizov

Scepticism about films' sales potential at this year's Sundance was, as usual, confounded by the high prices paid for titles that might be deemed the stereotypical 'Sundance film' (sensitive, quirky, *et al*): see, for example, the parodically titled *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*. As a first-time attendee, I wanted to (and succeeded in) avoiding all such unfortunately emblematic works. Of the 14 festival films I saw, five I'd have no trouble imagining as the best of the year; of the rest, only one inspired real ire (Matthew Heineman's dreadful drug wars doc *Cartel Land*: all access and no insight).

The nonfiction side included two tough, slightly underwhelming documentaries on sexual abuse (Kim Longinotto's *Dreamcatcher*; a celebration of a Chicago abuse-support group; and Frida and Lasse Barkfors's *Pervert Park*, a portrait of a Florida trailer park that offers housing for sex offenders returning from prison), one outstandingly disturbing debut (Crystal Moselle's *The Wolfpack*, about a group of siblings brought up in near-isolation by their parents in New York), and two unimaginative, easily sellable properties with obvious target audiences. These were *Best of Enemies* – examining the televised debates between Gore Vidal and conservative writer William F Buckley during the 1968 Democratic National Convention – which is ripe for public television and classrooms; and *City of Gold*, a shapeless profile of Los Angeles food writer (and admittedly true American hero) Jonathan Gold, with just enough culinary footage to sate the millions who spend hours watching Food Network and Gordon Ramsay.

Anticipation and attendance is disproportionately pegged to 'buzz' and marquee value. A queue began forming more than two hours before Craig Zobel's ultimately disappointing *Z for Zachariah* – viewers were presumably more drawn to Chiwetel Ejiofor and Chris Pine than curiosity about what the writer/director of grim American workplace/venal capitalism portraits *Great World of Sound* (2007) and *Compliance* (2012) would do next. Intermittently allegorically sharp on race relations and the American split between secular and religious citizens, this post-apocalyptic love triangle stumbles early with overbearing music and falters increasingly often.

Experimenter attracted a less swollen but still capacity crowd, presumably similarly drawn by the whiplash-inducing cast (broad enough to include Winona Ryder, comic Jim Gaffigan and beefcake Kellan Lutz). That didn't stem a torrent of walkouts unamused by Michael Almereyda's aggressive deployment of alienation effects



Pressing the right buttons: Peter Sarsgaard in Michael Almereyda's *Experimenter*

(artificial backdrops ranging from advertising illustrations to black-and-white rear projection for a driving sequence) in this Montaigne- and Nabokov-quoting biopic of experimental psychologist Stanley Milgram (Peter Sarsgaard). The film is terrific but (even if Almereyda's first short premiered here in 1987) out of place at the festival, too rigorously idiosyncratic to have broad appeal. If a stereotypically 'difficult' film arrives with star bait, is it in the right place to find an appreciative acquisitor? Such titles don't seem to flourish here.

The Chinese Mayor is an anomalous selection of the type I wish the festival had more of. Hao Zhou's portrait of municipal government in chaotic action was a welcome, long-overdue representative of the vital boom in Chinese independent documentaries – their very legality unclear, rigorously shot and

Sean Baker's 'Tangerine' is a clear standout in the often unadventurous world of American independent cinema



LA confidential: Sean Baker's *Tangerine*

assembled, courageous without being self-congratulatory in seeking out and recording potentially dangerous social dissent.

Common wisdom among those impatient with the prototypical 'Sundance Film' holds that the puzzling NEXT sidebar is the festival's most rewarding. Here are titles that are too something-or-other for the main competition slates – less in thrall to unimaginative storytelling, more divisively formalist. Sean Baker's *Tangerine* seemed to attest to NEXT's superiority: shot with an energetically ever-moving iPhone 5S, this raucous portrait of black trans escort life in Los Angeles is innovatively aggressive and constantly comic in an overheard-on-the-street shaggy-dog manner, a clear standout in the often-unadventurous world of American independent cinema.

Andrew Bujalski's first digitally shot feature, *Results*, is also his first film with name actors, not least game lead Guy Pearce, who slips effortlessly into the writer/director's haltingly hilarious rhythms. Bujalski's terrific first three features, troublingly, didn't play Sundance despite its status as the de facto launch pad for important American independent cinema, and his truly adventurous *Computer Chess* was confined to NEXT. That he finally arrived in the main competition courtesy of a slightly glossier style and known players was playing to festival type, but at least it's as expressively his film as ever; better invited later than never.

As a sceptical first-timer, five significant films is more than I expected: good work still premieres at Sundance, even if it sometimes seems out of place with the dominant tone.

Dreamcatcher is released on 6 March and is reviewed on page 64



VOICE OF PROTEST
Selma director Ava DuVernay (above) was determined to present a wider view of the US Civil Rights Movement and not to let it rest solely in the hands of Martin Luther King, which she believes is too reductive

With its title alone, *Selma*, the fourth feature from American director Ava DuVernay, indicates that the film's focus will be the people of that Alabama town, so key in the Civil Rights Movement, as much as it will be about the film's subject, Martin Luther King. Taking place mostly in 1965, when King was in Selma to organise marches pushing for legislation to end racial discrimination practices in voting and voter registration, DuVernay's film captures an especially fraught and significant chapter in the battle for civil rights and in King's life. Television and newspaper reports of the marches, and the violent response they met from police under the orders of Alabama Governor George Wallace (played in *Selma* by Tim Roth), brought national attention to the issue, and pushed President Lyndon Johnson (portrayed by Tom Wilkinson) to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965, perhaps sooner than he would have done without that pressure.

With the help of DP Bradford Young, DuVernay captures the beauty in so many of the faces and voices that contributed to this critical moment in American history, the lessons of which still reverberate today. Following the shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, in August last year, a month after *Selma* finished filming, DuVernay found herself watching protests in Ferguson on cable news at the same time as editing scenes of 1960s protests in her film.

By avoiding the approach of a traditional biopic, DuVernay accomplishes something more unusual: a portrait of process and strategy that shows the way in which these can both work with and against a purely emotional outlook. This was also one of the key themes in her previous film, *Middle of Nowhere* (2012), about a woman coming to terms with her husband's incarceration

following an eight-year jail sentence, and which won the Best Director prize at the Sundance Film Festival. *Selma* has reached a larger audience than her previous three films (which include *This Is the Life*, a 2008 documentary exploring the alternative hip-hop movement in Los Angeles in the 1990s), and it's an audience largely unfamiliar with her work. That might account for the fact that *Selma* has been nominated for a Best Picture Oscar but not for Best Director, despite clearly being the work of an auteur with a strong sensibility.

Having now worked with DuVernay on two films, David Oyelowo, the British actor who plays King in *Selma*, has developed a strong partnership with the director and is now set to act in her next project, a love story and murder mystery that takes place during Hurricane Katrina. Oyelowo was attached to *Selma* from the project's early stages, when different directors were in the frame, and it was his championing of DuVernay to producers that helped bring her on board. She quickly made the project her own by significantly rewriting the existing script, as she explains below, and directed Oyelowo in a way that eludes mimicry: in his portrayal, King's voice is an instrument that builds until it reaches a crescendo of power and familiarity in the final scene. Like everything in the film, Oyelowo's performance is deft and subtle.

Miriam Bale: The script for *Selma* had been in development for a long time before you got hold of it. I understand the earlier script was structured around a sort of antagonist/protagonist relationship between King and President Johnson.

Ava DuVernay: Yeah, it was more of a two-hander between the two men. And I was very interested in elongating our view of the Civil Rights Movement and not letting it rest only in Dr King's hands, which is inaccurate. ➤

In keeping its focus on one of the key chapters of the Civil Rights Movement – the Selma-Montgomery marches and the push for the Voting Rights Act of 1965 – Ava DuVernay's 'Selma' avoids the pitfalls of the biopic and succeeds in portraying Martin Luther King with a rare intimacy

By Miriam Bale

WALK WITH ME

ILLUSTRATION BY ALEX WILLIAMS/PHOTOGRAPHY BY FABRIZIO MAZZE



 There were brilliant, brave people around him in leadership positions: intellectual strategists and all kind of folks who contributed to the success of the movement. But often, with the homogenisation of King's image, that kind of complexity, of his leadership of leaders, is watered down. So that was a big part of what we wanted to bring into play, as well as to humanise him in general.

MB: What changes did you make to the script? Did you add many new characters? Did you place more emphasis on the female characters?

AD: Yeah, Malcolm X, the arc between Dr King and his wife Coretta, the John Lewis Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC] storyline. The [original script] focused on Johnson, King and the White House. So everything outside of Johnson, King and the White House, whether it was the murder of Jimmie Lee Jackson, the murder of James Reeb, these things that enhanced the core story, which was the fight for voting rights in a political realm. My addition was to fill that out with a few things: certainly women, certainly King's family life, certainly a look at him as a human being, not an icon encased in marble, and also a look at all the colleagues around him. With the SNCC, with Malcolm X, there was not one monolithic black thought on how to proceed, just like there isn't now. So part of what we wanted to show was that diversity of thought at the time on how to act, and how to move forward.

MB: King's speeches were not available to you [because of copyright issues], so you had the Herculean task of writing words for him.

AD: Yeah, I had to become Dr King's speechwriter for a little while there, which was very odd. Luckily my English and African-American studies majors from UCLA came in handy, much to my mother's delight. Finally the degrees were put to use. It was really about getting underneath the intention of his words. I couldn't use the exact words, but what I was trying to do was understand the ideas he was communicating in his speeches: really bold, really radical ideas that it would have been a shame to have locked away because of rights issues.

MB: When I watched it for the second time, I noticed all kinds of subtleties in the structure, and part of that was in King's speech at the end. He's talking about poverty for everyone, including whites, and that echoes what Johnson says at the beginning of the film, of wanting to first prioritise the war on poverty. Was that intentional, that echo?

AD: Yes, yes, absolutely. The two men [King and Johnson] were speaking each other's languages. It was always a matter of timing. It was always a matter of context. But essentially, in that moment, in 1964-65, you had two huge, huge minds, and huge personalities working towards some of the same ideas, just in different ways. So, yes, that callback was on purpose.

MB: In the film you have King, Johnson, the SNCC and Malcolm X, and they all have different strategies. I couldn't help thinking of different strategies of art, too. There's radical art, and there's making art for white liberal audience... Was that something you were thinking about, those parallels?

AD: Well, it's a complex question, but I'll just say I make art for myself. I'm not making a piece thinking, will it appeal to a white liberal audience, or will it appeal to the black community, or will it appeal to him or her? I make art to satisfy myself, my own likes, my own tastes. My



I'm not making a piece thinking, will it appeal to a white liberal audience, or will it appeal to the black community?

I make art to satisfy myself, my own likes, my own tastes

own opinions, ideas and aesthetic sensibilities are important to a piece, and I have to trust as an artist that it will find an audience, that there will be people whose hearts and minds work the same way that mine do, and there will be some connection. But once you start making anything, especially for me as a black woman filmmaker, to try to start to please people outside of myself, for that to be the context in which I make things, is a death-knell. It's a strangulation of instincts, of intention, and it's something that I work very hard not to do.

MB: What sparked that thought was a specific scene between King and the SNCC where they talk about awakening the black consciousness versus challenging the white consciousness. And I can't help thinking about the way that films do that as well. But maybe that's not intentional.

AD: Look, I said I make films for myself, so I make films for black people, and I make films for women, and I make films for people from California, and I make things for people who are all the things that I am. So certainly in my identity I am an African-American, so yes, certainly I am speaking very directly to the African-American people. Is my intention to make films for them? No, it's to make art for myself. So basically the parallel you're making is, is this film to raise white consciousness? No, that's the answer. I see the parallel you're making, but it's not that cut and dried for me.

MB: In your last film, *Middle of Nowhere*, some of the most amazing scenes were of bureaucracy, of just trying to get paperwork, waiting in line. I could see some of the same themes in this. There tended to be a theme of bureaucracy versus drama.

AD: I don't see it as bureaucracy, I see it as my interest in process. In *Middle of Nowhere* you see this woman and her process in supporting her husband who's incarcerated and what that looks like. Beyond just, "I love him." What do people in that situation actually have to do in order to nurture the love and the relationship? And if process is essential to *Middle of Nowhere*, it's certainly tantamount in *Selma*: the process by which freedom is fought for and won or lost. The process by which minds are changed and hearts are changed. And part of that is bureaucracy and heavy lifting, and passion. That's where my interests lie as a filmmaker. "How does this work?" is usually what I'm asking myself.

MB: I'd like to talk about one of the scenes that opens the film [the bombing by white supremacists of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, in September 1963, which resulted in the death of four little girls. The subsequent shock and outrage spurred the Civil Rights Movement to a new level of intensity and engagement]. The scene was so powerful and the way you shot it was so interesting, almost abstract.

AD: Whenever we shot any act of violence, beyond the shock of violence, one motivating factor was having reverence for the life lost. I am allergic to this trend in film where you hit someone, and then [the camera] follows the hitter, and then you just go on, and you've forgotten about the person who's on the ground who's been hit: his spirit, his face, his body. In an action film, you can do that; but in this, when we're talking about lives that matter – particularly black lives that matter – for me it was important to have reverence for that life. That dictated the aesthetic in terms of the framing, the pace, and the action in those sequences.



ALL KING'S MEN

David Oyelowo as Dr King (top, second left) marching with key figures in the Civil Rights Movement, before they are confronted by Alabama State Troopers (above), under orders from Governor George Wallace, (Tim Roth, opposite page); King (below) with President Johnson (Tom Wilkinson), and with his wife Coretta (Carmen Ejogo)



MB: The film gives scrupulous attention to historical details, so the controversy about its supposed distorted portrayal of Johnson has been surprising [some, like former Johnson domestic affairs chief Joseph A. Califano Jr, have criticised the film for what they allege is a portrayal of Johnson that suggests he was more resistant to King's demands than he was in reality]. People's reactions to this seem to speak more to a perspective of how history is handled; here it's less hero-based. It seems to be hitting something deeper, as far as the way people view history.

AD: There's a comfort level with hagiography and iconography. There's a comfort level with hero worship, with keeping important people at a distance and a comfortable haze of respectability, and a patina of, "Everything was OK because this person lived." It really does a disservice to the person. A lot of this controversy has done a disservice to Johnson. One of the things that was most fascinating about him was his reversal, his change, his progression. How do you go from a man who for two decades voted against every piece of desegregation legislation that came before him to the man who signed the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Let's see that beginning, middle and end. Let's not be a custodian of a legacy that wasn't real. Why don't we embrace what it was and see the beauty in that. So we did that with Johnson, we did that with Dr King, we did that with all the freedom fighters in the film.

Ultimately, history is viewed through everyone's personal lens. The way you and I remember this conversation is going to be different. If I say that mine is accurate, then I discount your experience and I discount your voice and I discount your memory. And it's dangerous. And in the case of *Selma*, it's been beyond unfortunate; to say unfortunate is me being kind and measured. The hope is that people go out and check out the film for themselves. And really invite different perspectives about history, about the present, and about what the future will be. A part of this whole idea is inclusion and representation, and everyone's voice mattering. Everyone's opinion is valid, including the people who think *Selma* is hogwash. That's valid. But the point at which those opinions overtake that, and become attacks on my freedom of expression is the point when I lose patience. This has been a process that's really tested patience. But I've grown a lot from it, and I've become even more fervent in my desire to continue to tell stories in the way that I see them. And I will not be deterred by anyone who says my voice isn't valid.

MB: You've announced your new film, in which you'll work again with David Oyelowo. Can you tell me more about that?

AD: I've been thinking a lot about doing something around Katrina, and trying to think of different approaches to it. It's so big. It's like doing something about the Civil Rights Movement; you have to find something to emotionally hook into. And there's so much going on. You have the legislative malfunction, you have the levees breaking, you have the Superdome [where people took shelter], you have people on rooftops. It's so sprawling that I think I found a through line with a genre approach with a love story and murder mystery. But it speaks very directly to the chaos and tragedy of the disaster, and the triumph of it. So it's really just a narrative function to organise the story, because it is so big. ☀

i *Selma* is out now in UK cinemas and was reviewed in our February issue

LONG WALK TO FREEDOM

'Selma' might be the first major cinema release to feature Martin Luther King, Jr as a central character, but the wider Civil Rights Movement has long proved a draw for filmmakers

By Ashley Clark

The African-American Civil Rights Movement has proved fertile ground for filmmakers to explore, interrogate and recreate – particularly during the critical period between the Brown v Board of Education court case to end segregation in public schools in 1954 and Martin Luther King Jr's assassination in 1968. The latest example, Ava DuVernay's Alabama-set *Selma*, is significant for many reasons: it's the first feature directed by a black woman to be nominated for a Best Picture Oscar; it paints an unusually detailed portrait of the process of nonviolent direct-action protest; it reframes the thrust of the movement from an exceptional 'great man' to a grassroots plural, in the process highlighting the role of women; and – with controversy raging over the unpunished police killings of black males Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, John Crawford and Akai Gurley in 2014 – its messages are particularly timely.

Selma, surprisingly, is also the first major cinema release to feature Martin Luther King, Jr as a central character, indicating that other filmmakers have been daunted by his legacy. While King's assassination – and the subsequent riots – have been repeatedly invoked as a marker of place and a signpost of the cultural climate in historical films (*Ali, Get on Up*), the only other notable recent incarnation is Nelsan Ellis's cameo portrayal in Lee Daniels's fictional epic *The Butler* (2013), about a real-life African-American manservant who served in the White House between 1957 and 1986. Instead, significant portrayals of King have been confined to TV movies. Abby Mann's six-hour biographical miniseries *King* (1978) featured Paul Winfield in the role, and prompted an inconclusive congressional investigation into King's assassination following its provocative suggestion that he was the victim of a conspiracy. More recently, Jeffrey Wright assumed the role with gravitas in the 2001 HBO film *Boycott*, a dramatisation of the 1955–56 bus boycotts in Montgomery, Alabama, which prompted the US Supreme Court to rule segregation on public buses unconstitutional.

Television has traditionally been the pre-eminent platform for filmmakers to



X marks the spot: Spike Lee's biopic of the firebrand activist, *Malcolm X* (1992)

tell historical stories about the key events and figures of the movement, perhaps because the medium is more suited to a pedagogical approach. This is true for uplifting, informative films such as Charles Burnett's Disney-produced *Selma, Lord, Selma* (1999), which covers much of the same ground as DuVernay's film, but with a softer touch; and Julie Dash's biopic *The Rosa Parks Story* (2002), in which Angela Bassett gives a layered performance as the eponymous community organiser and catalytic figure of



Abby Mann's TV miniseries *King* (1978)

the Montgomery protests. In 1991, Sidney Poitier brought his star power to George Stevens, Jr's TV epic *Separate but Equal* to play lawyer Thurgood Marshall, the key figure in the 1954 Brown v Board of Education case.

Conversely, when Hollywood has tackled civil rights, the films have tended to prioritise the experience of white saviours, or have sweetened the pill with soothing depictions of interracial friendships. The former is evident in traumatic historical dramas such as Alan Parker's *Mississippi Burning* (1988), a 1964-set tale of FBI agents (Gene Hackman and Willem Dafoe) investigating the killings of three civil rights workers; and Rob Reiner's *Ghosts of Mississippi* (1996), which foregrounds the role of an assistant district attorney (Alec Baldwin) attempting to convict a white supremacist (James Woods) for the 1963 murder of activist Medgar Evers. The latter, meanwhile, characterises fictional fare such as Richard Pearce's *The Long Walk Home* (1990), which turns on the decision of a well-to-do white woman (Sissy Spacek) to support her black maid (Whoopi Goldberg) in the mid-1950s Montgomery protests; and Tate Taylor's *The Help* (2011), a Mississippi melodrama set in 1963, one year before the Civil Rights Act was signed into law. *Selma*, refreshingly, refuses to extend that trend. In this respect it has more in common with *Malcolm X* (1992), Spike Lee's epic portrait of the charismatic orator who, after initial scepticism, eventually began tentative participation in the civil rights

movement before his assassination in 1965.

Much of the best contemporaneous civil rights-era cinema focused not on the machinations of protest but on the lived realities of African-Americans in the segregated South (Michael Roemer's superb, neorealism-inspired 1964 drama *Nothing but a Man*), and in the north, where *de jure* discrimination in housing and employment blighted black family life (Daniel Petrie's faithful and beautifully performed 1961 adaptation of Lorraine Hansberry's Chicago-set play *A Raisin in the Sun*). Meanwhile odd, daring films utilised high concepts to explore both the absurdity and terror of racism. Carl Lerner's *Black Like Me* (1964) told the fact-based tale of a white Texan journalist who spent six weeks travelling throughout the racially segregated South disguised as a black man. Melvin van Peebles's *Watermelon Man* (1970), meanwhile, starred comedian Godfrey Cambridge as a cocky, racist white man who one day awakens to discover – to his horror – that he is black. By the end, he's come to terms with his blackness and is seen practising combat with a black militant group: a harbinger of the burgeoning Black Power movement, and a jarring reminder that legislative gains did not end racism. Set in the direct aftermath of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jules Dassin's criminally underseen, Cleveland-set *Uptight* (1968) follows the last days in the life of a poor, young urban black man who finds himself hopelessly caught between his family, the bottle and his radical activist friends.

Away from fiction, low-budget documentary filmmaking of the era, such as Haskell Wexler's *The Bus* (1964), Charles Guggenheim's Academy Award-winning *Nine from Little Rock* (1964), and Ed Pincus and David Neuman's *Black Natchez* (1967), accounted for some of the most bracing insights into the movement's internecine rivalries and procedural complexity. The great black independent filmmaker William Greaves was commissioned to make a documentary about "good negroes" for public television during a time of growing unrest, but bucked the assignment to deliver, in *Still a Brother* (1968), a non-pat investigation of the mental revolution that was transforming the consciousness of black people of all classes. The year 1970 saw the (sadly limited) release of Sidney Lumet and Joseph L. Mankiewicz's exhaustive, three-hour archive footage film *King: A Filmed Record... Montgomery to Memphis* (1970), which won an Academy Award, and is now thankfully available on DVD. The civil rights documentary ur-text, however, remains PBS's mammoth *Eyes on the Prize*, which covers the movement in forensic detail across 14 hours.

The passage of time has seen a flourishing



A bridge too far: Charles Burnett's Disney-produced *Selma, Lord, Selma* (1999)

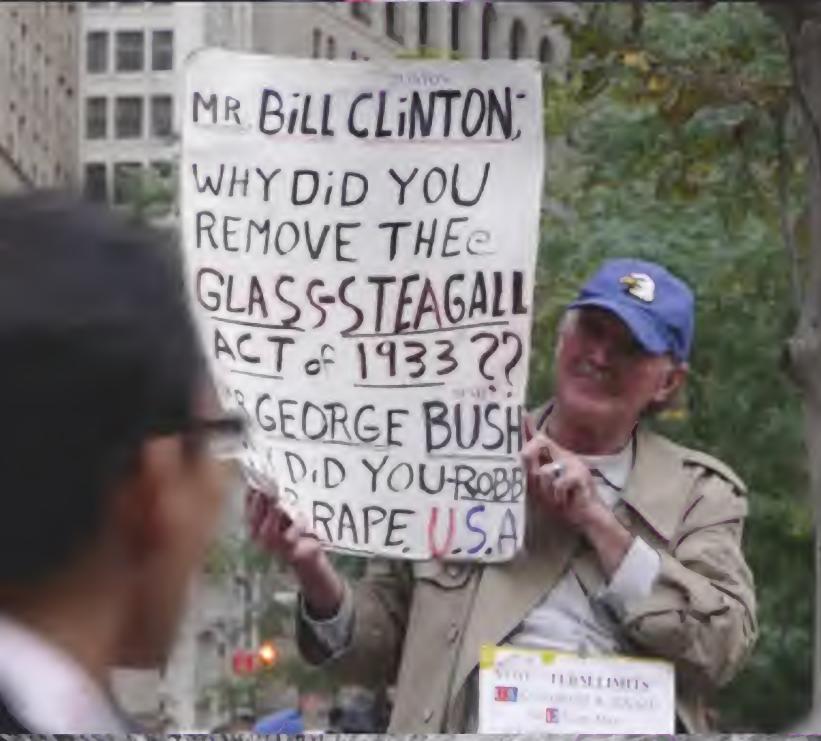
subgenre of documentaries adopting a reflective approach to assessing the era. These include Dick Fontaine and Pat Hartley's *I Heard it Through the Grapevine* (1982), in which author James Baldwin retraces his time in the South during the movement to see

When Hollywood has tackled civil rights, the films have tended to prioritise the experience of white saviours

what's changed; Spike Lee's rage-inducing *4 Little Girls* (1997), about the racist bombing of the 16th Street Baptist church in Birmingham, Alabama, in September 1963; and *Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin* (2002), a study of a key figure who helped organise the 1963 March on Washington. Finally, *The March* (2013) is both the title and subject of John Akomfrah's superb account of the event on its 50th anniversary. Like *Selma*, it sheds valuable light on a thrilling, terrifying and instructive time in contemporary history. **S**



Freedom rider: Julie Dash's *The Rosa Parks Story* (2002), starring Angela Bassett



DIFFERENT DRUMS

Sergei Loznitsa's 'Maidan', exploring the anti-government protests in Kiev's central square in the winter of 2013-14, is the latest in a worldwide upsurge in films documenting dissent in all its forms, capturing the hope, anger and creativity that characterise life on the barricades

By Nick Bradshaw

RISING TIDE
(Clockwise from top left)
Jonathan Demme's short film *End the War, Tax the Rich, We're the 99%*,
Occupy Wall Street (2011);
Jehane Noujaim's *The Square* (2013); Ogawa
Shinsuke's *Sanrizuka: Heta Village* (1973); Eisenstein's
Battleship Potemkin (1925) and *Strike* (1925);
and a scene from one of
Jem Cohen's *Gravity Hill*
newsreels about Occupy
Wall Street

It's one of the great shows: a popular groundswell filling the public arena, suspending everyday routine, demonstrating political engagement and solidarity, asserting mass conviction and purpose, protesting injustice, naysaying authority, celebrating natural liberty, communing. Conditions will of course vary: the protest may be a march or a sit-in, a defined rally or an entrenched campaign, it may be more or less orderly or chaotic, the mood involving some particular mix of hope, anger, joy, exuberance, determination and bravado, and the objective will involve anything from changing a law to a regime to a mindset. But some change will be the aim, which is where it comes into alignment with art: seeking to probe and puncture 'reality' and the given order of things, to defy the tyranny of convention and the conventions of tyranny. Depending on the will of the enemy (in particular, his propensity for violence), the upshot of the carnival may be triumph or terror and tragedy; sometimes neither, sometimes both.

In the past few years documentaries about protests have flourished – in part surely because of the explosion of protests around the world, from Western anti-corporate and anti-war marches to the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement, anti-Putin demos and last year's Euromaidan revolution in the Ukraine, but in part too because of the pervasion of digital cameras and would-be documentarians around the world. Every revolution now seems to get its documentary, if not several; from Jehane Noujaim at Cairo's Tahrir Square (*The Square*, 2013) to Sergei Loznitsa at Kiev's Maidan (*Maidan*, 2014), there's a sense of established filmmakers dropping prior work and dashing to the scene of a protest when something kicks off. And while not every revolutionary camera-waver has what Jem Cohen – whose 2011-12 *Gravity Hill* newsreels from Occupy Wall Street can be seen on his Vimeo channel – calls the "long-haul stick-to-it-iveness" (or any other artistic requisites) to turn their footage into rich cinema, the sight of ranks and sallies of professional and amateur camera-wielders amid the madding crowd has become part of the vernacular of protest documentaries.

Up too has sprung a mini-genre of nonfiction movies that put their technological innovations to the fore as they bear witness: Anders Østergaard's *Burma VJ: Reporting from a Closed Country* (2008), a collage of guerrilla footage of Burma's failed 2007 Saffron Revolution smuggled out of the country; Ali Samadi Ahadi's *The Green Wave* (2010), a part-animated patchwork of testi-

monies of Iran's brutally suppressed Green Movement sourced from tweets and blogs as well as talking heads; and Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi's *Five Broken Cameras* (2011), a diary portrait of life on the front line of occupied Palestine in which the right to document one's political condition is yet another suppressed liberty. Even in China, where fear and censorship have limited protests since the crushing of the 1989 demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, films such as Alison Klayman's *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry* and Stephen Maing's *High Tech, Low Life* (both 2012) broach the use of the internet and social media as platforms for dissent, documentation and virtual congregation.

THE ART OF PROTEST

If street demonstrations are an outlet for creative energy, it's only to be expected that they typically encompass other forms of artistic expression and defiance too, besides photography and videography. Music predominates, from the spirit-raising beat of the drum or marching band to songs and dance: it's no surprise that inveterate muso Jonathan Demme's short YouTube walkabout *End the War, Tax the Rich, We're the 99%*, *Occupy Wall Street* (2011) devotes its opening minutes to a sidewalk drum show, replete with diverse dance responses; likewise Jem Cohen's newsreels feature a fiddler performing, though true to their close inscription of the Occupy movement's free-for-all democratic experimentalism, they also record pop-up booksellers, pop-up knitters and a debate over the politics of neighbourhood drumming. Placards and banners are an obvious site for pictorial art and wordplay (Demme's movie has a lovely shot of a man trying to get his placard filmed; amid so many cameras, it shouldn't be so hard). In *The Square*, revolutionary graffiti art by the main protagonist Ahmed both punctuates the different temporal sequences and expresses its author's state of mind. Dancing in the street is almost a given in a protest's early stages: the sequences of joyous group dance circles in a film such as Talal Derki's *Return to Homs* (2013), from Syria, have a particularly tragic resonance given foreknowledge of what would befall their celebrants. Poetry is both quoted and given the stage in *Maidan* – and uploaded and punished by torture in May Ying Welsh's Al Jazeera report *Bahrain: Shouting in the Dark* (2011). Underground theatre intersects with and reflects the post-election protests against President Lukashenko in Madeleine



 Sackler's *Dangerous Acts Starring the Unstable Elements of Belarus* (2013) – another film made using smuggled footage – while the performance art of Voina and Pussy Riot are the subjects of Andrey Gryazev's *Tomorrow* (2012), Maxim Pozdorovkin and Mike Lerner's *Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer* (2013), *Pussy Versus Putin* (2013) by the Gogol's Wives collective, *et al.*

If a film wants drama, though, it needs an antagonist. Protests by definition have them, but dictators and corporate boards rarely turn up to be counted, still less political and economic systems entire. Instead what serves in documentary is usually symbolic and often synecdochic: the name of the tyrant, a brand logo. Happily the forces of law and order have (except when deploying undercover agents) traditionally been amenable to supplying their troops in typically sinister-looking uniforms, nowadays often hidden behind dark helmets and visors to reinforce the impression of shock-force inhumanity. There are many exceptions to this rule, from the mass



of flat-capped and not always officious-looking NYPD waddling around both Cohen's and Demme's movies – with large plastic handcuffs hanging off their belts – to the impassive-faced soldiers who stonewall protesters in *The Square* and *Winter, Go Away!* (a bustling 2012 tour across St Petersburg of the various campaigns to fore-stall Vladimir Putin's reascension to Russia's presidency, made by ten graduates of Marina Razbezhkina's School of Documentary Film and Documentary Theatre), and indeed that film's police chief who wryly condescends to the liberal lawyers questioning his powers of arrest. But the faceless guys are scary – and presage a dramaturgy of riot shields, truncheons, cavalry, stone-throwing, tear gas, water cannon, opposed forces charging/retreating/fleeing, guns, blood wounds, fallen bodies, wailing comrades, funerals. (*Bahrain: Shouting in the Dark* is notable for extending the theatre of protest into the hospital.) Sometimes the devastation documented extends beyond even individual human victims: Ogawa Shinsuke's epic seven-film *Sanrizuka* series of embedded portraits of peasant farmers resisting the construction of Tokyo's Narita airport (1968–77), still the acme of devotional protest filmmaking, captures the erasure of a landscape and occlusion of a culture.

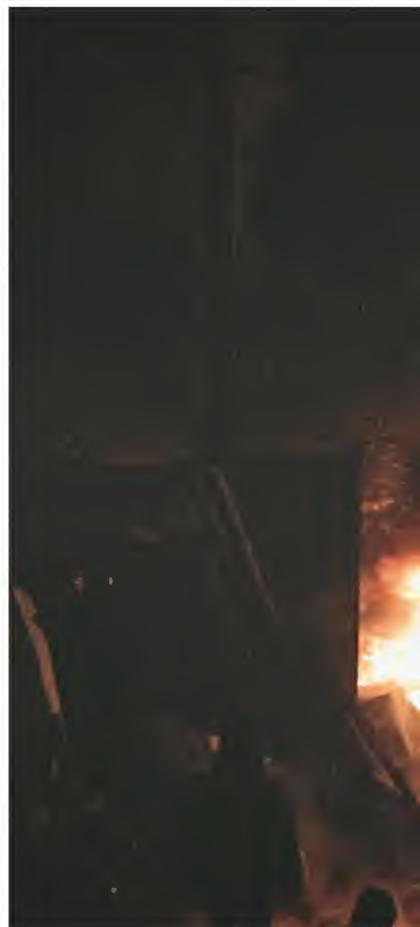
Such is the protest-film template, dating back to Eisenstein's true-revolt fictions *Strike* and *Battleship Potemkin* (both 1925) – as acknowledged by the opening sequence of Chris Marker's post-60s revolutionary elegy *A Grin Without a Cat* (*Le fond de l'air est rouge*, 1977), which intercuts *Potemkin's* Odessa Steps slaughter with comparable documentary images.

What other stratagems might a protest movie employ? Some manner of abstraction would be an obvious starting point. Contra (or in mirror image to) Marker's documentary turn, there's a strain of film that embeds real demo footage within a fictional narrative: the 1968 Democratic Convention riots in Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool* (1969), anti-Vietnam protests in Peter Whitehead's *The Fall* (1969), Iran's Green Movement in Hana Makhmalbaf's *Green Days* (*Ruzhaye sabz*, 2009), demonstrations during the 2012 French election campaign in Justine Triet's *Age of Panic* (*La Bataille de Solférino*, 2013). The Arab Spring has also given rise to a kind of pan-revolutionary portmanteau or montage form, segueing between or eliding multiple events, as in Jonny von Wallström, Javeria Rizvi Kabani and Alexandra Sandels's *Zero Silence* (2011), Peter Snowden's *The Uprising* (2013) and Greg Barker's *We Are the Giant* (2014).

Slippery, provocative and contentious in a perhaps more fruitful way is *Demonstration* (2013), made by the Russian master Victor Kossakovsky with 32 creative-documentary students from Barcelona's Pompeu Fabra University; like *Winter, Go Away!* – or the Ukrainian collaborations *Euromaidan. Rough Cut* (2014) and various missives from that country's Babylon '13 collective – it's a portrait of the masses made by a mass. ("I was the dictator," Kossakovsky told the audience at his Amsterdam International Documentary Festival premiere, "but I was playing democracy. I had to listen to 32 opinions.")

A portrait of a Barcelona anti-austerity demo in March 2012 (though including footage from a second event in November), it applies the bold gambit of syncing its images to the music playing that day at the city's Liceu Opera House, Ludwig Minkus's *Don Quixote* – hence the film's subtitle, 'A Film Ballet'. The protests become a performance, all groups playing their part – the sundry tribes of protesters and vandals, the riot police, firefighters, tourists... Police helicopters are made to skate across the sky by an elegantly scored camera move; the morning-after street cleaners appear to be dancing a waltz; there's a delicious shot of protesters delicately advancing and retreating from screen left in front of a Burger King, their police opponents evidently just off-camera to the right.

The effect of the soundtrack is inescapably arch and ambiguous – prettifying, festive, mocking, though of exactly who or what is up for grabs. From time to time Kossakovsky lets the sync soundtrack bleed in, initially for comic effect (the press corps' camera shutters snapping away as percussion), later more shockingly, as when the orchestra suddenly gives way to a pandemonium of bullets, sirens, whistles and calls for an ambulance. Who or what might be the Quixote figure, and what might be the windmills? The film closes in on one recurring figure, a veteran radical we first encounter harmlessly reciting his disenchanted life lessons; later we find him in high operatic mode, grandiosely flinging himself to the ground and goading the police to "Kill me! Kill me!" Towards the end Kossakovsky again interrupts the dance, hauling this man into the editing suite to judge his performance, alongside a woman who actually lost an eye to a rubber bullet in the November demo. It's a film about provocation, from the undercover agents in masks and hoodies we see climbing back into police vans to the cameras themselves – and one wonders about the modern global dance of protests and the media they engender.



FIRE WERE STARTED
Sergei Loznitsa's *Maidan* (above) offers a grimly optimistic account of the public protests in Kiev against President Viktor Yanukovych, while Victor Kossakovsky's *Demonstration* (left) observes an anti-austerity protest in Barcelona in 2012



Loznitsa's *Maidan* is quite different, though it too works its soundtrack hard. Before seeing it I'd been musing on what possibilities digital recording had opened up for the protest documentary: lots of close-up spontaneity, for sure, but also surely the kind of durational, sculptural 'slow' cinema forged by wide-shot master James Benning and others. As it happens *Maidan* embraces that mode (Loznitsa, like Benning, was trained as a mathematician): hewn from massive wide shots that reach for the panoramic qualities of a Bruegel painting, it's a grimly optimistic account of a popular revolution and the building of a national consciousness, increment by increment.

Loznitsa sets his terms in the opening shot, a long-held canvas of faces turned to the camera (presumably on the Maidan's stage) and singing Ukraine's national anthem, to which the film will return for a subsequent chapter. This is a story of 'the people', and Loznitsa refrains from selecting individuals as representatives of anything in the novelistic style of a film like *The Square*. (Nor does he deign to demonstrate any outlier politics, as critics of the revolution would wish.) Instead the attention is on the organisation and obduracy, as well as the solidarity and spirits, needed to mount a peaceful public revolt, especially in the depths of winter. Alongside the street dancers, the poets and school carol-singers on stage, we see a campaign room that resembles a nursery classroom with its posters and crayons, sandwich-kitchen volunteers, a market-like stall of great soup vats being stirred with six-foot paddles, oil-drum fires, barricades dismantled, others erected, people milling about, waiting, sleeping.

Images are tilted to the actuality of protest – we see little of the stage and even fewer politicians – while its ideals are given more voice on the soundtrack: offscreen stage speakers define the charges against the enemy (a "lawless and criminal" dictatorship that by reneging on an accord with the EU "took away our hope... You cooked stuffed cabbage, invited the dancers – and then cancelled the wedding"); 'civil activist training' is advertised, recalling the myriad workshops on offer around Zuccotti Park during Occupy Wall Street; an adaptation of the WWII Italian partisan song 'Bella ciao' proves a crowd hit. The sequence shots reflect the sense of staunch patience and uncertain outcomes. Later, of course, in January and February 2014, the storm breaks and we see pitched battles, smoke and missiles, the Berkut special police firing from a rooftop, from near and far. There's one moment when Serhiy Stetsenko's camera has to duck and dive, when journalists are fired upon; more startling is the diegetic 'voiceover' from the offscreen megaphone that organises and encourages the protesters through the climactic scenes – celebrating a first victory over the Berkut, advising on tactics and directing fighters, calling for safe passage for surrendering police and for the family of a lost boy to come to the stage. Without glamourising or vicariously dramatising the events to which it bears witness, the film finds a new, non-rhetorical language to salute the will to freedom and dignity, the ability to forge order from chaos – and the almost ritualistic way in which these efforts and sacrifices require making and remaking. ☀



Maidan is released in UK cinemas on
20 February and is reviewed on page 83

'Maidan'
*embraces the
kind of sculptural
'slow' cinema
forged by wide-
shot master
James Benning,
and reaches for
the panoramic
qualities of a
Bruegel painting*

SMALL IS DUTIFUL

In 'Amour fou' the Austrian director Jessica Hausner has made, not for the first time, a quiet, decorous-seeming film that revolves around a silent, passive woman. But the passivity and formality conceal a deeply unconventional spirit

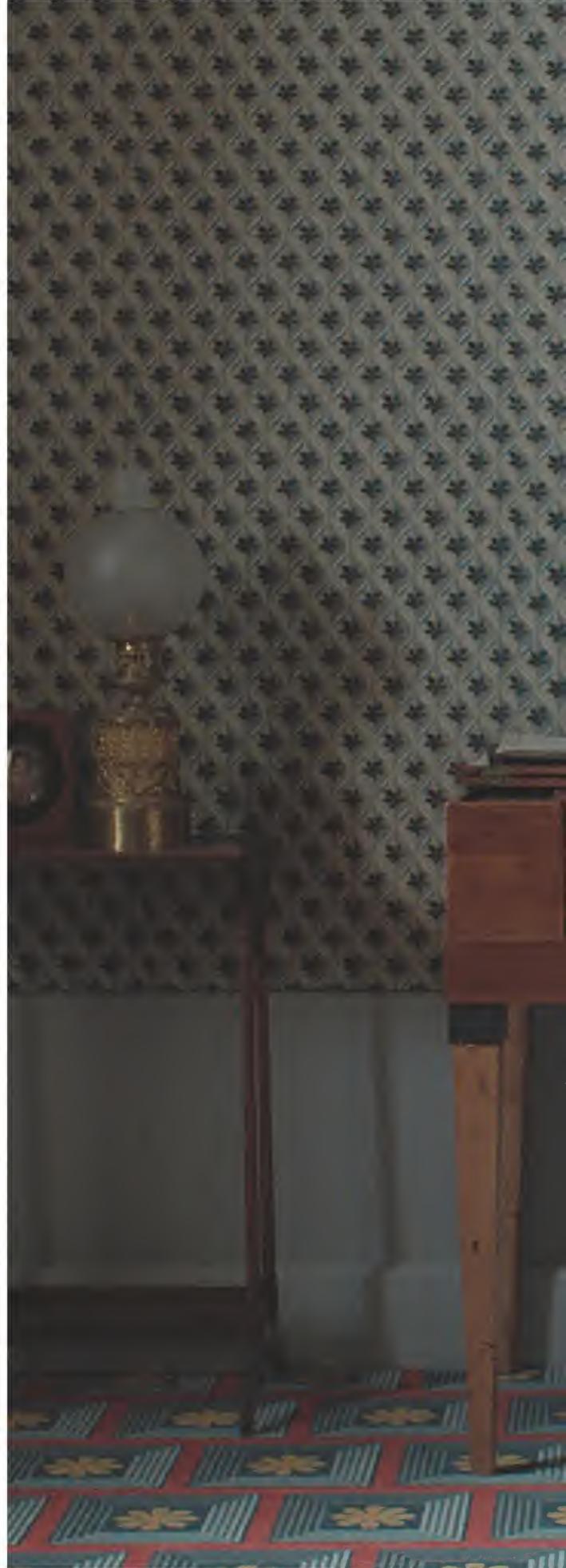
By Catherine Wheatley

Spoiler alert: this article reveals a plot twist

As a performance by a celebrated opera singer draws to a close, the heroine of *Amour fou* sighs: "It must be terrible to be so famous, and so exposed." That statement is loaded with irony, first because it is delivered by a fictional version of Henriette Vogel, the 19th-century socialite who committed joint suicide with her poet lover Heinrich von Kleist – their grave remains a Berlin tourist attraction. A second irony is that it was written by a director whose work remains shamefully under-seen by audiences outside her native Austria. Jessica Hausner is hardly struggling with excess exposure, and *Amour fou* – a small, sardonic tragicomedy charting the events that led up to Vogel and von Kleist's demise – is unlikely to change that. Yet the 42-year-old filmmaker is slowly building a reputation as one of the most visually unusual directors working today, together with a body of work that gently probes the limits of representation.

A graduate of the Vienna Film Academy, Hausner is one of a group of younger Austrian filmmakers and technicians struggling to carve a distinctive ➤

BIRD IN A GILDED CAGE
Birte Schnöink as Henriette Vogel, who in real life was an accomplished intellectual, but who emerges from *Amour fou* as a sweet subservient housewife, decorative, accommodating, and mostly silent





 identity for their films in an industry that is enjoying something of a golden moment but over which the shadow of Michael Haneke looms large (Hausner bristles at profiles of her that over-emphasise a short stint as script girl on *Funny Games – mea culpa*). A spirit of collaboration unites several of these individuals. Alongside the writer-directors Barbara Albert and Antonin Svoboda and the cinematographer Martin Gschlacht, Hausner is one of the founder members of coop99, a production company and platform for new filmmakers. The company stresses that a personal approach to filmmaking lies behind such diverse work as Hubert Sauper's 2004 *Darwin's Nightmare* and Shirin Neshat's *Women Without Men* (2009), as well as Hausner's own theatrical releases, *Lovely Rita* (2001), *Hotel* (2004) and *Lourdes* (2009), as well as *Amour fou*. (Hausner has also made a graduation film, *Inter-View*, and the gorgeous, bonkers *Toast* from 2006 – about a woman making toast – but sadly, neither has seen international release.)

Hausner's work is part of a national cinema, then, but it is wrought through with a unique and decisive sensibility that marries coolness with kindness and wry, sardonic humour (she describes her most recent work as a romantic comedy). *Amour fou* takes real events as its starting point, and is the director's first period film, but in all other respects it shows clear continuities with her earlier theatrical releases, not least in its depiction of female subjectivity as inherently bound up with social expectation. Vogel, an accomplished intellectual in her own right, described in one account as "cheerful and voluble", becomes in the hands of Hausner and actress Birte Schnöink a sweet, subservient wife and mother, who lives according to the belief that "I am my husband's property, and I should never dare to demand freedom." She is decorative, accommodating and mostly silent.

In this last respect she stands in a line of quiet women in Hausner's films: they range from taciturn teen Rita (Barbara Osika) through self-effacing employee Irene in *Hotel* (Franziska Weisz, recently seen in *Stations of the Cross*), to the watchful paraplegic Christine (the mesmerising Sylvie Testud, whose performance lifts *Lourdes* to another level). These women do not give much away, nor do the films offer much in the way of anecdotal material: one knows little about how Irene came to work in the eponymous hotel, less still about Christine's life before *Lourdes* ("I don't get out much" is all she has to say on the matter). All appear haunted, however, by the suspicion that, as Christine puts it, "life is passing me by", and torn between opposing desires for confinement and liberty, conformity and uniqueness. In *Amour fou* the division is thematised by the repeated emphasis on the tax reforms that form a backdrop to the film's events. Through her characters Hausner argues, in essence, that taxation offers a form of freedom, where every peasant finally has responsibility and thus individuality – but whether they want that freedom is, of course, another matter. Time and again Henriette remarks – with some pride – how mundane and unimportant her life is. Until, that is, von Kleist dangles the possibility of an extraordinary fate before her.

Von Kleist is a whey-faced milquetoast, played with straight-faced pomp by Christian Friedel (*The White Ribbon*). His death-wish seems to spring from boredom and imminent bankruptcy more than passion. He has already failed to convince the real object of his affections



Hausner's women all appear haunted by the suspicion that life is passing them by, and torn between opposing desires for confinement and liberty

– his cousin Marie – to die with him when he turns his attention to Henriette. The age-old refrain "If you really loved me, you'd do this for me" having cut no mustard with Marie, he changes tack, chipping away at the foundations of the reassuring social structure that Henriette leans on. She is lonely, he tells her, she loves no one and no one loves her. To begin with, Henriette looks dubious, even dumbfounded, gesturing towards her husband and child as evidence to the contrary, but the poet's suggestions wield an insidious power. It's immediately after this perverse proposal that she begins to experience symptoms of an unexplained illness that casts a shadow over her otherwise contented existence and offers her the perfect excuse to take up von Kleist's offer.

It seems Henriette's final act of violence springs from the same sense of purposelessness that closes *Lovely Rita*. Both women are surrounded by tolerant, if tedious, families, and live comfortable, if not always contented, middle-class existences. Their longing for something more – something better – is nebulous, objectless, and so not easily satisfied, as the desultory endings of both films makes all too clear. Indeed, the real drama of Hausner's stories is interior conflict: only secondarily is this acted out in relations with others (usually men). In this respect, Hausner's heroines have much in common with those of Eric Rohmer and, latterly, Joanna Hogg. *Amour fou* is as much as anything else a film about a woman painfully, almost physically, wrestling with indecision.

We are not invited to share in Henriette's vacillations. But, as she falls victim to mysterious seizures, her body increasingly belies her professed composure. Likewise, the bodies of her predecessors in Hausner's work are embarrassments, encumbrances, and nowhere is this more clear than in the extended dance sequences that proliferate throughout the films. A far cry from the effervescent physicality seen in the films of, say, Claire Denis, these scenes are riven with awkward self-consciousness. At home and at a disco, adolescent Rita hunches to hide her oversized boobs and sticky armpits; shortsighted Irene pats at her hair and pushes spectacles up her nose – on the dance floor she looks prim and inhibited, unsure of where to look or how to move her arms. For much of *Lourdes*, Christine is condemned to be fed, washed and

pushed around by condescending volunteers as a result of her multiple sclerosis, and even after she is apparently healed by a miracle her body betrays her at the most humiliating moment, as the first bars of cheesy pop song ‘Felicità’ (‘Happiness’) by Al Bano and Romana Power start up. At the ball where Heinrich and Henriette re-encounter one another after their first, abortive attempt at self-immolation, the pair rotate in and out of shot like figures in a cuckoo clock.

In fact, despite the suggestive title, *Amour fou* is resolutely and deliberately unsensual throughout. Henriette’s relationship with her husband (Stephan Grossmann) turns mainly around political discussion and a sense of duty: they share a bedroom but not a bed; her doctor, misdiagnosing a tumour, has counselled the pair to avoid intercourse. At least, though, one suspects Vogel would prove willing if given the opportunity: Heinrich – a poet whose most celebrated work, the novella *The Marquise von O.*, turns around the comedy of errors that ensues from a “loving rape” – is outraged when an acquaintance makes a lewd insinuation, horrified when he stumbles across his barely dressed paramour. Not once do the ‘lovers’ touch. The film’s most physical moment comes courtesy of a hypnotist who traces the outline of Henriette’s body without once making contact.

Hausner’s are unapologetically small films, elegantly formed. Critics have compared *Amour fou* to a chamber piece, a minuet, and “a perfectly observed miniature” (Nick Roddick in *Sight & Sound*). Certainly, the visual style of the film – like *Hotel* and *Lourdes*, included in the Un Certain Regard sidebar at Cannes – offers a sensuous pleasure. Across her work Hausner has pared down her palette to a few symbolic colours – sickly greens in *Lovely Rita*, firebox reds in *Hotel*, cerulean blues for *Lourdes*. *Amour fou* is painted in a range of washed-out pastels, against which an occasional burst of colour – a bunch of orange tulips, a buttercup-yellow coat – appears vividly.

The film’s most remarkable formal conceit, though, relies on what the film theorist David Bordwell has termed ‘planimetric’ shots. These are static shots in which the camera stands perpendicular to a rear surface – most often a wall – and frames its characters as if they were clothes on a line or figures in a police line-up or mugshot. Sometimes the individuals are in profile, other times they face front. Sometimes the shots are taken from fairly close up, at other times they take in the surroundings. They can feature individuals or small groups. If the characters are set up in depth, they occupy parallel rows. Crucially, there is no place for diagonals. When there is a vanishing point, it is centred.

Hausner’s virtuoso use of this kind of image (for which credit is due too to her regular collaborators Gschlacht and production designer Katharina Wöppermann) has led to stylistic comparisons to Wes Anderson. But whereas in Anderson’s films the planimetric image evokes a playful naivety, in Hausner’s work it suggests a rigidity and claustrophobia that has more in common with the films of Chantal Akerman. Both directors capture their female characters in domestic settings that serve as both prison and stage: curtains and doorways protrude into shots, forcing Henriette – and notably her maid and daughter too – into increasingly confined spaces.

Hausner’s planimetric images literally tackle their subjects head-on, suggesting a stereotypically Austrian



bluntness of approach (as well as a deadpan framing that calls to mind Jacques Tati). Yet at the same time, these clean, flat images refuse us entry into the world of *Amour fou*: it’s a strange effect, as if we’re observing Henriette, Heinrich and their interactions through one-way glass. Hausner describes the camera as “like God’s eye – observing, never interfering”. There is no access to these characters, no way to insinuate ourselves at angles into the action. Repeat viewings don’t yield additional rewards. There is nothing to be grasped beyond the immediate, unfathomable surface of their images. If we can’t say quite why, finally, Henriette acts as she does – or indeed why any of Hausner’s heroines act as they do – it is because Hausner refuses to tell us.

The power of Hausner’s aesthetic lies in the fact that its superficial simplicity is not merely reflective of theme: it is a comment on the idea of an ‘inner life’ itself and its very impenetrability. All identification with her heroines is an impertinence – an affront to the mystery of their hearts. As the director herself puts it: “I want to talk in my films about the mystery of human beings. It is hard to know what goes on inside a person because one has to stay outside a person’s inner feelings. It’s impossible to understand someone completely or even halfway.” As *Amour fou* so elegantly bears out, in the end “everyone stays alone”. ☀

i *Amour fou* is released in UK cinemas on
6 February and reviewed on page 68

STATIC ELECTRICITY
In films such as *Amour fou*, starring Christian Friedel as the whey-faced Heinrich von Kleist (above), and *Lourdes*, starring Sylvie Testud as Christine (below), director Jessica Hausner (left) leaves the camera to observe her characters as if through one-way glass



Tainted Love

A recurring nightmare from director David Robert Mitchell's childhood inspired the menace that threatens the teen victims in his ethereal horror film 'It Follows', which triumphs in its stubborn refusal to be constrained by genre expectations

By Michael Blyth

For fans of the macabre it was gratifying that one of the best reviewed releases of 2014 was a horror movie. Jennifer Kent's maternal nightmare *The Babadook* impressed many critics, no mean feat for a low-budget genre picture. Yet *The Babadook* was just one of several indie horrors to find critical favour last year: the retro thrills of Adam Wingard's psycho impostor story *The Guest* and Mike Flanagan's nifty *Oculus* – about a haunted mirror – also did well. And if box-office horror was dominated by the uninspired likes of haunted-doll tale *Annabelle* and *The Purge: Anarchy*, the festival circuit was rife with breakout hits in the making. Gerard Johnstone's comic shocker *Housebound* and Justin Benson and Aaron Moorhead's *Spring*, the ghoulish lovechild of Richard Linklater and H.P. Lovecraft, stood out.

Having already gathered a healthy crop of plaudits since its premiere at last year's Critics' Week in Cannes, David Robert Mitchell's *It Follows* looks set to be the *Babadook* of 2015. Its shrewd blend of scares and smarts is liable to win over even the most sceptical commentators. The film follows Jay (Maika Monroe), a pretty 19-year-old whose life turns into a living hell after she has sex with her boyfriend Hugh (Jake Weary), who then reveals that she is now cursed, pursued by a demonic force that she can only escape by passing the curse on.

While Mitchell's concept of a sexually transmitted haunting is enough to leave film theorists salivating, he also ensures that every shot is infused with meaning, every line of dialogue reeling with subtext. Shot in and around Detroit, the film has an ethereal elegance that calls to mind Sofia Coppola's best work, while still delivering the kind of cold, hard scares that would make Wes Craven proud. Unnervingly long takes and intrusive tracking shots are used to excruciating effect. While Mitchell's approach to the genre is both imaginative and assured, those who saw his debut, the lyrical lo-fi charmer *The Myth of the American Sleepover* (2010), about four suburban adolescents coming of age over a long hot summer, might wonder what led him to make the leap into horror. But the two films are less disparate than they seem.

"I hadn't intended them to be in the same world, but I wrote them both and they're both about young people," says Mitchell, who I had the opportunity to talk to when

he was in town for the film's British premiere at the London Film Festival. "When I shared the script with Julio Perez [editor of both *Myth...* and *It Follows*] he was like, 'This is a dark sequel to your first film.' And I realised that he was kind of right. But it wasn't something I thought about when I was writing it."

Indeed, the unconscious mind played a large part in the film's inception. "The basic idea came from a recurring nightmare that I had when I was a kid. I was being followed by something that looked like different people and would always walk very slowly and walk right at me. It was actually quite easy to get away from, but the feeling that something was always coming and would always be coming was very disturbing. I remembered the dream and thought that elements of it would be cool to use in a film. As an adult I kept thinking of ways to build on it and it struck me that the obvious way to connect people was through sex, and have that physical and emotional connection."

Of course, the link between adolescent sex and death is the morally dubious foundation on which much of the horror genre is built, particularly the products of the slasher-dominated post-*Halloween* landscape. But while violence has so often been used as a means of chastising youthful indiscretions, I wondered whether Mitchell intended his film as a sly subversion of familiar tropes, or perhaps some kind of ironic perpetuation.

"It's not about trying to moralise, but to say that I wanted to subvert it isn't right either. It just seemed right. I'm aware of what it means in terms of the genre, but I felt that it was doing something different."

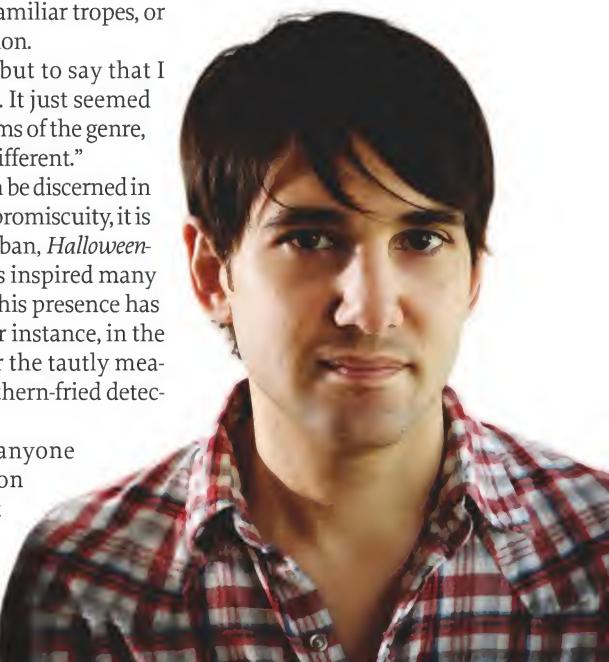
If the influence of John Carpenter can be discerned in Mitchell's loaded approach to teenage promiscuity, it is also evident in the film's sleepy, suburban, *Halloween*-esque milieu. Carpenter, of course, has inspired many genre filmmakers, but in recent years his presence has been felt more strongly than ever – for instance, in the electronic soundscape of *The Guest* or the tautly measured *mise en scène* of Jim Mickle's southern-fried detective thriller *Cold in July*.

"When it comes to *Halloween*, if anyone is even thinking about a comparison then I'm flattered like you wouldn't believe," Mitchell says. "I've watched



LOVE AND DEATH

David Robert Mitchell (below) has followed up his 2010 coming-of-age drama *The Myth of the American Sleepover* with horror film *It Follows*, starring Maika Monroe as Jay (above), but the similarities between them are as striking as the differences





his movies a million times. But there are a ton of films and filmmakers I have watched and studied and all that comes through in this movie... I wasn't trying to make my own version of a Carpenter film, I was just trying to do my version of a horror film."

And while comparisons are tempting, the defining feature of *It Follows* is arguably its originality of form and content. Perhaps that's because, unlike his fright-inducing contemporaries, Mitchell doesn't consider himself a horror director: "I want to do my version on many different genres and many different kinds of films. I like the idea of pushing myself and trying to do different things, because that's fun and scary and cool."

Could it be this lack of genre affiliation, the refusal to tie himself to one mode of filmmaking, that has freed Mitchell up to make something so extraordinary? While, say, Adam Wingard (*You're Next*) or Ti West (*The House of the Devil*) wear their horror badges with pride, their films tend to cater to bloodthirsty fanboys. The result can be an air of familiarity, a reliance on well-worn genre ideas or heartfelt references to horror classics.

Perhaps Mitchell's willingness to experiment is a characteristic of a filmmaker just making a quick stopover in the world of horror. *It Follows* is set apart from its peers by a compelling incongruity of tone, not least in the languid, dreamlike manner in which it is shot.

"My goal was for everything to have a reason and be very precise," Mitchell says. "With regards to the cinematography, Mike Gioulakis and I knew we wanted to keep to the wider end of the spectrum. Most of the

movie was shot on an 18mm lens, occasionally a little bit wider – I think it was a 14mm in a few places. The wide shots were done so that the frame could breathe. I wanted space around the edges so that the audience can look around in the world. We are not cutting frantically, so the viewer can adjust to a frame and feel like they are within that space and have enough time to look around and wonder if something is in the distance or coming along the edges. I wanted the movie to feel like nothing can get close without you spotting it. In the context of this movie, that can be scary."

This opportunity for the viewer to explore the frame isn't simply a means of cranking up the terror, it also gives them freedom to examine the set design, which is littered with seemingly incompatible details, like analogue television sets occupying the same spaces as futuristic e-readers.

"To me there's a nostalgia to the film, but I do think it's something modern as well," Mitchell says. "All of those things blur the line in terms of when is this happening. It's sort of a mixed message to the audience, who don't see how all these things connect, and that way it exists outside of time, like a dream or a nightmare. Actually, I think it's more like a dream. Something that is timeless, like a fairytale."

And as with the best fairytales, its darkness can be terrifying. Scary *It Follows* most certainly is – the most frightening US horror film to have emerged for some time. ☀



***It Follows* is released in UK cinemas on
27 February and is reviewed on page 77**

I wasn't trying to make my own version of a John Carpenter film, I was just trying to do my version of a horror film

BAD COP

In his second feature, 'Hyena', an ultra-brutal story about a corrupt policeman, Gerard Johnson has tried to avoid the clichés of the modern London crime film, instead harking back to John Cassavetes, Abel Ferrara and, above all, Jean-Pierre Melville

By Trevor Johnston

For the last ten years, writer-director Gerard Johnson has been a man on a mission, one that could be encapsulated in four words: a London *Bad Lieutenant*.

It wasn't as if anyone else was turning out proper, grungy homegrown crime flicks with aspirations to moral seriousness. That was a major part of Johnson's motivation, even when he was still an untried, self-taught hopeful who hadn't been to film school.

"We had all this formulaic crap telly, or a whole raft of the so-called 'London gangster film', a term which makes the heart sink," sighs the locally born and bred filmmaker, who first attracted attention in 2009 with his tellingly seedy portrait of a lonely Dalston serial-killer, *Tony*. "Britain used to be really good at this stuff, going back to the likes of *Performance* and *The Long Good Friday*, but that's before we started really churning it out. I wanted to do the kind of thing the French are good at, and the Americans used to be good at – a crime film about the cops in London, but one which wasn't just a calling card for a director wanting to do car commercials."

Hyena, Johnson's second feature, lives up to that ambition – major auto manufacturers are unlikely to be calling him any time soon. The film announces its intentions early, as a gang tools up, heads down an alleyway, and breaks into a UV-lit nightclub, where they proceed to beat the daylights out of the unsuspecting revellers. The artificially vivid blue lighting, Johnson's use of slow motion to delineate the unfolding mayhem, and a pounding electro score (courtesy of The The, aka Matt Johnson, Gerard's older brother) give the sequence a heightened rush that never quite detracts from its brutality. As the crew members gleefully display the bags of white powder extracted from their crumpled foes, it is clear that this lot are not to be messed with.

And these guys are the police: a crack unit of the Met, loyal to their leader, Michael Logan, who turns out to be the baddest apple of all. Barely recognisable from his uncanny turn as the weedy, psychopathic outcast in *Tony*, Peter Ferdinando returns in what is likely to be a career-defining performance, his character bulked up, coked up, and about to take the audience with him into a horrifying vortex of moral contradictions.

Logan's men have been taking their slice of the pro-

ceeds from their drug seizures, while Logan himself has been investing in a new route from Turkey, so he has his own supply chain. Enter a couple of machete-wielding Albanian brothers, currently carving out their own corner of West London thanks to a burgeoning narcotics and prostitution operation. They proceed to eliminate Logan's Turkish partner; Ferdinando's dodgy detective is left trying to recoup his losses by cutting a new supply deal with these two, the very crooks he's just been assigned to investigate. Meanwhile, Richard Dormer's internal affairs investigator is on the case and breathing down his neck...

In the end, the *Bad Lieutenant* label turns out to be a bluff, not because Ferdinando's ducking-and-diving protagonist falls short of Harvey Keitel's epic levels of misconduct (the Londoner keeps his private parts private, for instance), but because Johnson's screenplay offers no hint that spiritual salvation is on the agenda – a contrast with Abel Ferrara's Catholic-infused worldview, in which it is at least a possibility. Johnson mentions in passing Cassavetes's 1976 *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* as a marker, which is perhaps more apposite, specifically because of the way in which it draws us towards understanding an addled central character who bears a heavy responsibility for his own downfall. Indeed, like Ben Gazzara's doomed night-club owner in the Cassavetes film, the deeper the pit Logan digs for himself, the more human he becomes in his vulnerability. As Logan faces up to increasingly overwhelming circumstances, however, we can only wonder whether he has gone beyond the point of redemption, whether some degree of self-knowledge is the best he can hope for.

Given the way Johnson, 41, drops cinema references into the conversation, it is not surprising to learn that he comes from the Martin and John Michael McDonagh school of filmmaking – learning his craft by watching his way through film history. But while he knows and loves his Jean-Pierre Melville, and takes on board elements of favoured auteurs, he is not out to make movies about movies: his writing process is based on thorough research. The preparation for *Hyena* began, he says, around 14 years ago, when he and Ferdinando – his cousin as well as a pal – learned something unexpected about a guy they'd been hanging out with. 



POLICE AND THIEVES
In Gerard Johnson's *Hyena*, Peter Ferdinando plays corrupt cop Michael Logan (above), and Stephen Graham plays his old adversary David Knight (far right), who is appointed to investigate a team of Albanian criminals (right). Logan is working with: (from left) Alfred Doda as Berat, Gjekat Kelmendi as Rezar and Orli Shuka as Nikolla



Hyena “He had long hair, tattoos, a real party animal, great fun to be around. Then after we’d been kicking about with him for a month or so, someone took us aside and told us he was CID,” Johnson explains. “It’s not like he was investigating us, thank God, he just liked to unwind by burning the candle at both ends. He’d be up half the night carousing then, unbeknown to us, he’d go into work. As soon as we found out, I told Peter, ‘That’s our story.’ I even had the title *Hyena* at a very early stage.”

Cut to some years later, at the annual festival of British film in the Breton resort of Dinard, where Johnson, in town with *Tony*, got into the inevitable what-else-have-you-got conversation with the independent producer Stephen Woolley. The eventual consequence was that Woolley’s Number 9 Films and Film4 put *Hyena* into development. At this point, Johnson’s fact-gathering geared up: he interviewed women who’d been victims of sex-trafficking (which led directly to a subplot in which Logan’s conscience leads him on a mercy mission), made contact with the Albanian community (which resulted in convincing screen debuts by the Albanian non-professionals Orli Shuka and Gjevat Kelmendi, as the ferocious heavies), and talked to a lot of police officers on both sides of the straight and narrow, including one who is now leading a new life under the witness protection scheme. One person who wanted absolutely nothing to do with him, however, was the man who inspired the whole story; Johnson says he respected that decision.

“I had charities who worked with the trafficked girls telling me, ‘Please don’t make it like *Taken*,’” Johnson adds, “and, of course, you don’t want to create that kind of fantasy world, you want to get the details right. At the same time, when you’re doing a genre film you can’t suddenly turn it into some social-realist tract. There’s a line. You have to respect what this is – it’s a cop thriller.”

Having now shed the pounds he put on for the role, Ferdinando (fresh from completing Ben Wheatley’s J.G. Ballard adaptation *High Rise*) echoes those sentiments about keeping it real while allowing yourself licence to tell the story. “I went out on raids with the Suffolk police, where they’ve got a lot of drugs crime in Ipswich. Understanding what it means to be a police officer, that really cemented the performance for me – to own that space was very important – but this is also a drama, and as we know from politics, the more people are placed in a position of power, the more they’re going to abuse that privilege. Logan, essentially, is morally bankrupt; he’s made so many bad choices there’s nowhere left to run... And yet I had a certain sympathy for him. There’s a good man in there, even if so much of what he does is wrong.”

Ferdinando’s performance is mesmerising, sketching out Logan as a man who himself is always playing a role – loyal compadre to his gang of miscreant coppers, get-the-job-done enforcer to his superiors, trustworthy collaborator to the drug dealers with whom he’s embedded. Yet the character’s moments of self-doubt and vulnerability, subtly conjured up by a downcast look here or a moment’s hesitation there, shift our reaction from revulsion to fascination. Ferdinando’s work is absolutely central, since Johnson’s script dispenses with any sort of exposition-friendly confidant to expose Logan’s inner self; instead, Dorner’s ferociously motivated internal affairs investigator acts as the conscience our deeply flawed anti-hero has long been trying to silence.



For Johnson and his cameraman Benjamin Kracun – the young Scot who had previously done a sterling job realising the myriad visual textures of Paul Wright’s *For Those in Peril* – the key lay in finding an approach that would highlight this inner ferment. As Kracun says, “You had to bring out a certain existential-ness, otherwise it would be just another procedural.” The score by The The uses vintage analogue synths to conjure up a desolate chill redolent of Tangerine Dream’s scores for Michael Mann and for William Friedkin’s *Sorcerer*. Meanwhile, the film’s balancing act between streetwise reality and heightened expressivity is played out through bold choices of colour – moving from cobalt blue tiles in a memorable corridor tracking shot, to the crimson enclave of the Albanians’ strip joint, to the orange motorway lights that signal the protagonist’s infernal journey towards reckoning. That progression, Kracun notes, was already in the script: “It was all there, the build-up in colour and then draining it away so you’d be left with this empty coldness when Logan reaches the end of the line. So we tried to achieve that by working with what we found on locations and then enhancing that, rather than being too interventionist about it.”

Hyena has already been recognised on the festival circuit, having premiered at Edinburgh last year and then picking up the top award at Sitges. While Johnson takes pains to position it as a genre item, free from delusions of arthouse grandeur, the manner in which the film delivers on its cop thriller promises while manifesting cinephile savvy – all the while ensuring its aesthetic imperatives stay in contact with its realist roots – certainly serves notice of the director as a distinctive emerging talent. What’s riling him in the meantime, however, are any thoughtless comparisons of *Hyena* to Nicolas Winding Refn: “I’m fine if reviewers mention *Drive*, but this just isn’t the same thing as *Drive* – that whole stylisation approach is something I really tried to avoid. Stop being lazy and look back a bit, because whether it’s Nicolas Winding Refn, or even Walter Hill, ultimately we’re all taking from Melville. That’s the foundation.” **S**

i *Hyena* will be released in UK cinemas on 6 March and is reviewed on page 77

Britain used to be really good at this stuff, going back to the likes of ‘Performance’ and ‘The Long Good Friday’, but that’s before we started really churning it out

POLICE STORY
Director Gerard Johnson (above) had the idea for *Hyena* more than a decade ago, after meeting and hanging out with a long-haired, tattooed party animal who turned out to be a CID officer



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NEW YORK STORIES

Ira Sachs borrows heavily from his own life experiences for 'Love Is Strange', merging the influences of Ozu and Woody Allen to paint a gentle character study of a gay couple whose lives are thrown into turmoil when they decide to get married after almost 40 years together

By Keith Uhlich

It's been wonderful to see the near-unanimous accolades afforded Ira Sachs's devastatingly poignant drama *Love Is Strange*, especially for those of us who have long sung the praises of this talented American independent. The Memphis Tennessee-born, New York City-residing director's filmography – comprising five features and several shorts – is distinctive, incisive and empathetic, dealing with the struggles of everyone from two worlds-apart adolescents navigating their sexuality (1996's provocative *The Delta*) to the melancholic trophy girlfriend of a temperamental music producer (2005's Sundance Grand Jury Prize winner *Forty Shades of Blue*) to a 1940s-era middle-class couple whose wedded non-bliss nearly leads to murder (2007's sorely undervalued *Married Life*). In 2012, Sachs turned the camera on himself, lightly fictionalising one of his own troubled relationships in *Keep the Lights on* with a tender and trenchant eye that won him many new fans.

Now comes *Love Is Strange*, which feels like a warmer complement to *Lights*. It's also a queer love story, but one that begins in a place of blissful comfort: after almost 40 years together, Manhattanites Ben (John Lithgow) and George (Alfred Molina) – a painter and a music teacher, respectively – take advantage of New York's new marriage laws to wed. Their joy is dashed after George loses his job as choir director at a local Catholic school: in the

eyes of the administration he has gone against the laws of the church. Without George's salary, the couple has no choice but to move out of their apartment. While they look for a new place, they're forced to separate, George going to live with gay cop neighbours Ted (Cheyenne Jackson) and Roberto (Manny Perez), and Ben with his novelist niece Kate (Marisa Tomei), her husband Elliot (Darren Burrows) and their irritable adolescent son Joey (Charlie Tahan).

Describing the particulars of *Love Is Strange* may make it sound somewhat farcical, though in execution it's anything but – much more of a gentle character study that makes brilliant use of narrative ellipses and mundane incident to sketch in a very specific milieu, and plumb untold depths of emotion. "It really seems to be a film that defies the expectations of people who see it," Sachs says when we sit down to discuss the film at his downtown Manhattan office. "They think it's going to be any number of things that it ends up not being. I kind of wish we'd been able to give audiences a better sense of that – how the film makes monumental these two seemingly average people."

The movie had its origins during the production of *Keep the Lights on* when Sachs and his co-screenwriter, Mauricio Zacharias, attended a retrospective of Ozu Yasujiro films. Ozu's

MANHATTAN TRANSFER
In Love Is Strange John Lithgow plays Ben and Alfred Molina plays George (above), a longstanding couple who are forced to move when George loses his job; Marisa Tomei co-stars as George's novelist niece Kate (below)





1953 masterpiece *Tokyo Story*, also about an extended family in crisis, is one of the primary inspirations for *Love Is Strange*. "Mauricio and I watched a lot of Ozu," he says. "We would go every Saturday to IFC Center and see an Ozu film – it was really life-changing for me. Those films gave us a kind of permission to tell a domestic story, and I loved how they allowed for life's comedy. We were also influenced by Woody Allen movies of a certain period, like *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986) and *Husbands and Wives* (1992), which are milieu films about generations of families within a few New York apartments, both of which manage to do big things with a small number of plots and issues. Mauricio wrote the first draft of the movie, then we started going back and forth on it and we finished the script around Thanksgiving of 2012. Alfred Molina was the first person we sent the script to, and he got on board very early. Michael Gambon and Kelly Reilly were attached, but then we finally cast John Lithgow and Marisa Tomei, and we shot in the summer of 2013."

When creating the central couple and several of the situations they find themselves in, Sachs drew heavily from his own life experience. "Ben and George are a combination of my parents – my mother and stepfather – who've had a 45-year relationship," he says. "And Ben also shares many of the traits of my great-uncle's partner, a sculptor named Ted Rust who lived in Memphis.

I was very close to him the last ten years of his life. And when I met my husband, the painter Boris Torres, he was living in a townhouse owned by an older gay man in his 70s. Boris lived on the first floor, the older man lived on the second floor and on the top floor were two gay cops, one of whom was as good looking as Christopher Reeve, totally out of the closet and obsessed with fantasy games like Cheyenne Jackson's character. Our world in that house was something that for years I was interested in making a film about. That kind of communal nature within a New York apartment building."

The film's title, never referenced in the movie proper, came from a different source. "We got to the title through the Mickey & Sylvia song 'Love Is Strange,'" Sachs recalls. "It's used in *Badlands* and in *Dirty Dancing*. I heard the song, thought it was great, and wanted George and Ben to sing it at their wedding. About two weeks before we started shooting, we were in final negotiations for the rights with the estate of Mickey & Sylvia. They said we could have the song for a lot of money, but they would contractually make it that we couldn't use the song as a title because they wanted to make their own movie about Mickey & Sylvia called *Love Is Strange*. So I made a decision and chose the title over the song. I like that the title is itself strange. I think of it as uneven. It's not the word you think of at the end of that sentence." 

My screenwriter Mauricio and I watched a lot of Ozu. It was really life-changing for me. Those films gave us a kind of permission to tell a domestic story

 In a way, it talks about my interest in avoiding the potential sentimentality of the film. Though this is a genre movie on some level – it's trying to be a tear-jerker, it's trying to be romantic – at the same time it's trying not to deny the complexity of the relationships and the struggle to maintain intimacy. Alfred Molina has said that, for him, he thinks it's like a Shakespearean term – 'strange' as in magical. To me it suggests this feeling of the unknowable. The film attempts to know these characters, but also accepts the unknowable."

Though he didn't get the rights to the song he wanted, Sachs was able to make an inspired choice for the film's score, utilising the serene music of the Polish Romantic composer Frédéric Chopin, which gives the film a profoundly wistful air. "For one scene in which George is giving a young girl a piano lesson," Sachs says, "Mauricio wrote that she would be playing a Chopin étude. We found a particular one for her to play, and from that point I always thought that piano felt like a natural accompaniment for the film. So I imagined a score like that. And because of what we did on *Keep the Lights On* – using the music of Arthur Russell for the score – I also thought we could work with archival compositions. I've learned a lot about music from the people who I've worked with. Dickon Hinchliffe, who did two of my scores, taught me about the history of music and its relationship to the film score and my music editor on *Love Is Strange*, Suzana Peric, is just a genius and a treasure. She came up with the movie's last cue when it goes from a Chopin piano composition to a fully orchestrated version of the same piece. It's a very 20th-century cinematic touch – the music swelling – since Chopin didn't write for orchestra. We wouldn't have had the money or time to create that ourselves, so we were lucky it was in the archive."

For the film's visual palette, which captures Manhattan in a spellbindingly tranquil way, Sachs enlisted Christos Voudouris, cinematographer of Yorgos Lanthimos's *Alps* and Richard Linklater's *Before Midnight*. "I like what's coming out of the Greek New Wave. I really like the use of light. I think that on some level I've been very influenced by European cinema and European shooting styles and so I've found in the last couple of films that it's been useful to go to the source. Instead of trying to find a collaborator who is learning a style with me, I can bring my Americanness to something, they can bring their own heritage and history and there's a chemistry that occurs. Christos and I were particularly inspired by Maurice Pialat's films *Loulou* and *A nos amours*. I've been rewatching both those movies for years, but I discovered new things working with Christos. The lenses on *Love Is Strange* are much tighter, so the perspective is more straightforward. It's not as observational as my previous work and I think that the camera often moves to a point where it's looking directly in the eyeline of the actors. That creates a different kind of intimacy."

Audiences across the world have responded in kind to the movie, and Sachs is fascinated by how the reaction appears to break down. "It's interesting," he says. "The viewers who really respond to the film are teenagers and people who are 30 and above. Twenty-year-olds want *Keep the Lights On* and the pain of that film. They miss that anguish, which is a very particular kind of youthful anguish. There are three perspectives in the film – adolescence, middle-life and older life. So there isn't a point of

I like what's coming out of the Greek New Wave. I really like the use of light. I think that on some level I've been very influenced by European cinema

identification for someone who's a young adult. Personally I've been very moved by the response of professional women to the film, specifically to Marisa's portrait. People feel she nailed something that is not often seen, which is the attempt of someone trying to be both a good worker and a good mother, and all the compromises and balances that go with that. That's really, really hard and somehow her character really speaks to a lot of people."

Since his 2010 short film *Last Address*, a powerful, dialogue-free study of the homes of NYC artists who have died of Aids, Sachs has been working at a much quicker pace. He and Zacharias are currently researching a script about Montgomery Clift for HBO, with Matt Bomer attached to star, and he's also got a new feature written and ready to go. ("It's called *Thank You for Being Honest* – about two boys, 12 and 13, one gay, one straight – who take an oath of silence and stop talking to their parents.")

When asked about his increased productivity, and how he's come to where he is over the arc of his career, Sachs gets reflective. "I kind of came to a halt before *Last Address*," he says. "I was not in a groove. *Last Address* was a real turning point for me because I took control of the economic reality of my work and I made something at the top level of what I could aesthetically. Understanding that the economics were my responsibility, as opposed to passively waiting for them to meet my reality, was a turning point for me. *Last Address* also ended up being a turning point in terms of subject matter – a reinvigoration of a very personal, autobiographical kind of cinema.

"Thinking about my own career trajectory, I come back to the differences between the opening sequences of *The Delta* and *Love Is Strange*, because you can actually see them as complete inverses of each other. They're both about intimacy, but *The Delta* takes place at night, without words, as two people look for love and sex illicitly. The opening of *Love Is Strange* is a similar sequence in terms of defining place and character, but it's in the daytime, between two men who've been together for 38 years. That is a really striking shift in terms of the differences between those two films and in terms of a difference in the culture. There's a kind of hopefulness in *Love Is Strange* that mirrors my own at the moment." ☀

 *Love Is Strange* is released in UK cinemas on 6 February and is reviewed on page 82

PERSONAL BEST
Ira Sachs (below) attributes his recent increased productivity to his renewed enthusiasm for a very personal, autobiographical style of cinema and to a realisation that he had to take control of the economic aspects of his work



PHOTOGRAPH BY FABRIZIO MALESE

TALES FROM THE GOLDEN AGE

Although cinema has traditionally sidelined narratives about older LGBT people, there has been a notable increase in such stories lately, reflecting a range of recent cultural shifts

By Ben Walters

Boys on Film – the series of short-film compilation DVDs from the LGBT-specialist distributor Peccadillo Pictures – has now reached its 12th volume. There are no current plans for a companion series of Old Men on Film. This is hardly a surprise: in general, LGBT film culture has been no less enamoured of youth than mainstream cinema. But that has been changing over the past few years. Ira Sachs's *Love Is Strange* is only the latest in a new wave of films seriously engaged with the experience of older LGBT people. Several factors might be involved in this shift – demographic change, curiosity about the past, and anticipation of the future.

Cinema is hardly littered with examples of older queer characters and where they have existed, they have generally been ridiculous or pitiable. Even when given centre stage and a degree of sympathy, they have tended to be tragic, and perhaps also absurd or grotesque. Beryl Reid's George in *The Killing of Sister George* (1968) has her moments of triumph but still ends up broken, while older male characters often fall prey to *Death in Venice* syndrome, mooning more or less sympathetically and fatally after unattainable objects of desire: as well as Visconti's 1971 film itself, see *Love and Death on Long Island* (1997), *Gods and Monsters* (1998), *Capote* (2005) and arguably *A Single Man* (2009). There have been exceptions: Terence Stamp's transgender character Bernadette in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994) is strikingly self-determined in life and romance; and Christopher Plummer's Hal in *Beginners* (2010) takes to his late-blossoming gay life with good-natured aplomb.

The past couple of years, however, have seen a notable increase in films that pay attention to the experience of older LGBT people on their own terms. The trailblazer was Sébastien Lifshitz's *Les Invisibles* (2012), a documentary portrait of ten French people that was one of the first films to take seriously – or even to acknowledge – the richness and complexity of older queer lives. Many of Lifshitz's subjects had been activists at the time of gay liberation – a period during which socialising and indeed



Two's company: Sébastien Lifshitz's *Les Invisibles* offers a rare portrait of older LGBT people

sex between LGBT people of different ages was more common than today. For younger queer audiences, unused to spending time with those outside their own age group, the film was not just a vivid testament to the vibrant subjectivity of those on screen but a reminder that they existed at all.

Subsequent titles have included P.J. Raval's *Before You Know It* (2013), an American documentary about three gay senior citizens; *Before the Last Curtain Falls* (*Bevor der letzte Vorhang fällt*, 2014), about a group of older LGBT cabaret artists; and Stefan Haupt's *The Circle* (*Der Kreis*, 2014), in which a dramatised version of a real-life story about a gay-rights group in 1950s Zurich is interspersed with material about the subjects' lives today.

These titles emerged alongside the trend for mainstream features catering to grey audiences – pictures about and for an ageing demographic such as *My Old Lady* (2014), *Quartet* (2012) or *The Best Exotic Marigold*

Hotel (2011). Regardless of sexuality, all of these titles share an interest in exploring and reflecting back the experience of the baby-boomer generation as it enters its twilight years with its spending power relatively intact. But when it comes to the LGBT titles, something more seems to be going on. They are not particularly targeted at viewers of an age with their subjects, and they invite a kind of double perspective, particularly for younger audiences: in the absence of first-hand contact between generations, they affirm the reality of the queer past as lived experience; at the same time, they offer a vision of a lived future to a gay culture whose dominant media often seem to suggest that life ends at 40 (if not 35).

When it comes to fiction, there's still more afoot. Where *Love Is Strange* takes us inside an embattled yet resilient same-sex relationship of many decades' standing, *Gerontophilia* – arch-provocateur Bruce La Bruce's 2013 lovers-on-the-lam escapade – centres on the bond between a beautiful boy (Pier-Gabriel Lajoie) and an elderly care-home resident (Walter Borden). These two kinds of relationship are very different but neither has previously been depicted on screen often, if at all.

Perhaps the real power of this new wave has less to do with the past than the future. It could be seen as part of a 'backward turn' in LGBT film culture, alongside other new waves of stories with period settings, documentaries about historic subjects, and archival rediscoveries. At a time when the battle for legal equality in Europe and North America seems to have been won, this looking back is surely partly about taking stock of how far we have come. But it's also about exploring how many ways there are to live a queer life, and starting to imagine how a queer future might look. ☈



The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert



OF HUMAN BONDAGE

'The Duke of Burgundy', which tells the tale of a pair of lesbian sadomasochistic entomologists, is the latest film from the mischievous mind of director Peter Strickland, a characteristically idiosyncratic drama that manages the unlikely feat of marrying the sexploitation ethos of Jess Franco with the cosy domesticity of *'Terry and June'*

By Demetrios Matheou

The Duke of Burgundy is a sadomasochistic lesbian love story, with lashings of lip service to the sexploitation films of Jess Franco. So it's quite a surprise when the film's director says it reminds him of the 1980s British television sitcom *Terry and June*.

The reference is typical of the lively, sponge-like and mischievous mind of Peter Strickland, who after three impeccably individual features remains something of an enigma, with the films themselves providing the smoke-screen. A Transylvanian revenge drama (*Katalin Varga* in 2009), a psychological horror film set in sound studios during the post-production of a fictional Italian *giallo* (*Berberian Sound Studio* in 2012), and the new film, which stars Sidse Babett Knudsen (the Danish prime minister from the TV series *Borgen*) as a dominatrix – at first glance, none of these suggest a Briton at the helm, let alone someone from the London satellite town of Reading.

In fact, the 41-year-old Strickland can be firmly placed in a very British tradition of idiosyncratic nonconformists that includes Ken Russell, Peter Greenaway and Derek Jarman – great stylists all, willing to infuse their films with art, ideas and wit, and never averse to shaking our tails.

PUNISHMENT PARK
In *The Duke of Burgundy*,
directed by Peter Strickland
(right), Sidsel Babett
Knudsen plays Cynthia
(above), a dominatrix with
an interest in crickets,
locusts, grasshoppers

PHOTOGRAPH BY FABRIZIO MALTESE

The particular bent of his material can be attributed to a singular cinema education spent as a teenager at London's much-lamented Scala cinema – with its heady array of the avant garde, *outré* and scandalous – and in the company of the makers of New York's Cinema of Transgression, alongside a long residence in Central Europe ("self-exile" as he puts it, the only way he can afford to be a filmmaker) and an unashamed immersion in genre.

Equally significant is his eclectic taste in music. When Strickland visited New York in the early 90s he was discovering No Wave bands such as Sonic Youth, Swans and Suicide at the same time as meeting the city's underground filmmakers. In 1996 he founded The Sonic Catering Band with friends from Reading, a brilliantly eccentric venture in electronic music that involves recording the sounds of food preparation and cooking, then processing them aurally. The band has performed throughout Europe, while Strickland has released its music on his own label, Peripheral Conserve, alongside a catalogue that includes Krautrock, modern classical and field recordings – a 2003 recording of mole crickets has just found its way into *The Duke of Burgundy*, the director's "one concession to product placement". Last year he co-directed the concert film *Björk: Biophilia Live*.

And so it's possible to see through the exotic window-dressing of Strickland's films a certain pattern, both in conception – a spur, often via music; a genre; the desire to investigate the cracks of that genre's tropes – and in a unifying, even moral sensibility.

While it was an inheritance from an uncle in 2002 that gave the then-struggling Strickland the opportunity to self-finance his debut feature, a playlist helped him decide what that film would be. "I'm half Greek and at that point, beyond Greece, I hadn't really seen Europe," he says. "So when I got the inheritance that's the first thing I did. I listen to music a lot when I travel on trains. Going through Transylvania I had Popol Vuh on my headphones – *Nosferatu* and *Aguirre* – which quite instantly puts you into this altered state; certain musicians are quite primal like that. A lot of *Katalin Varga* came from that particular experience of those forests and mountains.

"There was also a genre element as a starting point, of that great revenge genre. My films are not realistic, but I try to put realistic emotions in there, try to follow the logic of these situations. Revenge films are never logical, in my mind. What if the person you kill has kids? The fact that innocent people are going to suffer is normally whitewashed out of films. What if the man who has raped you has redeemed himself? I'm not excusing such people, I'm trying to put the audience in this jury-like position. That for me is quite fascinating."

Made with Romanian actors on location in around 17 days, *Katalin Varga* followed the eponymous heroine across the Carpathians on a mission to avenge her rape, years before. It appeared in competition at Berlin in 2009, a dynamite surprise whose authenticity, economy and moral complexity is reminiscent of another scintillating genre debut, the Coen brothers' *Blood Simple* (1983).

One of the seeds for *Berberian Sound Studio* (2012) was 'Visage', a 20-minute piece of possessed howling" created by the Armenian-American opera and folk singer Cathy Berberian, with her husband, the Italian avant-garde composer Luciano Berio. "I'm quite aware that a lot of people will say it's unlistenable. But if you put it over a horror image your mind is immediately transported. That got me thinking about the relationship between avant-garde music and horror cinema, fantastical

cinema, the way, for example, Kubrick used Penderecki's music in *The Shining*. Avant-garde music, its textures and dissonance, really lends itself to those images."

His scenario involved a painfully retiring and naive English sound recordist (the appropriately gnomish Toby Jones) losing his mind while sound-mixing a tale of witchcraft and murder in an Italian post-production studio, a victim of Italian machismo and the unnerving experience of finding an aural accompaniment to Grand Guignol.

"Berberian was taking gothic horror from Italy, some *giallo*, not too much, and dissecting it, showing the mechanics," he recalls. "I was trying to have fun with it, coupling these pantomime actions like smashing vegetables with acts that are not remotely humorous, like rape and murder. Those ideas about violence just emerged organically as I wrote the script. I'm presenting that world and saying, 'You as an audience, find your way around this.' We only scratched the surface of the subject, the politics of horror, how we consume violence, how complicit we are."

Atypically, *The Duke of Burgundy* originated with an invitation, from the producer Andy Starke of Rook Films, to remake *Lorna the Exorcist*, the 1974 film by the infamous and prodigious purveyor of erotic horror Jess Franco. Although they moved away from a remake, Strickland remained keen to use Franco as a starting



point, "especially as Italian horror is recognised as being of note, artistically speaking, whereas exploitation is to some degree still in the waste bin of cinema."

The idea took him back to his Scala days – Borowczyk, Barbet Schroeder's *Maitresse*, but in particular *Mano Destrà*, a short film by the Swiss director Cleo Ubelmann, "a very interesting one, not really exploitation at all, more like Chris Marker doing a female-female bondage film." Strickland would flesh out that film's investigations into the complex S&M dynamic with his seductive and sly fable.

In a grand, moss-covered house in an indeterminate European locale populated only by women, the relationship between Cynthia (Knudsen), an orthopterist (someone who studies crickets, grasshoppers and locusts), and Evelyn (Chiara D'Anna), an amateur lepidopterist, revolves around strict role-playing, with Evelyn on her hands and knees servicing her mistress's needs. But then Cynthia buckles beneath the strain of her younger lover's exacting masochistic demands, and we realise that the boot is on the other foot.

"It's common sense that the masochist calls the shots," Strickland suggests. "And that paradox of

 power is ripe with ideas. I wanted to take the stereotypes from those sexploitation films – female lovers, with the masochist who's found her saviour sadist – and puncture that fantasy.

"I'm interested in what happens if one person in the couple doesn't want to do a particular act, finds it distasteful, or repellent. Or what happens if the other person knows their partner isn't happy, so tries to repress her desires? I'm not judging, I'm just showing how consent in a relationship can lead to compromise, then to coercion. And it can be beyond the bedroom, it can be about careers, for instance. Again, the story is not realistic, it's completely preposterous, but once you get beyond these sensational acts it's domestic drama."

And then he throws in *Terry and June*. The scenes of the reluctant sadist Cynthia embracing a night off in her pyjamas were purportedly inspired by the domestic sitcom about the middle-aged couple dealing with the day-to-day of their suburban existence, June as much mother as wife to the obsessive, juvenile Terry. "I love those scenes of them in bed, that comfy state of a relationship where you're eating your pumpkin seeds under the sheets."

The segue from sitcom suburbia to an exotic world whose inhabitants bicker over the attributes of the Grizzled Skipper – a British butterfly – or the failure to purchase a toilet is a perfect example of the tonal balancing act in Strickland films. "I'm also trying to laugh at the pragmatics of this world, the technicalities, the same as in my last film. What happens if you're all tied up and you get bitten by a mosquito? Stuff like that. But it's difficult to get the tone right; if you're too serious it tends to fall flat on its face, if too jokey then it becomes ironic."

While his dialogue is terrific, as a director Strickland is clearly happy, and adept at, letting image, music and sound drive his narrative, often in abstraction. He says he is unimpressed by character arcs or plot. "Atmosphere is what I really get out of film."

Which takes us back to Franco. Strickland observes that the inimitable atmosphere of the Spaniard's best films was derived from numerous elements, including the trademark zooms, his inspired choice of architecture ("*Lorna the Exorcist* has this weird futurist hotel, there's the gothic mansion in *A Virgin Among the Living Dead*, a very strange black house on an island in *The Perverse Countess*") and the work of great composers such as Bruno Nicolai.

"There's also the fact that he was a cinematic outlaw – he and his gang really were on the edge of society. Once

he'd assured enough sex to sell the film, the producers would just leave him alone. It's possible that because of that, and because he worked so quickly, things just ended up becoming fantastical and strange, without any intention. There were some very bad Franco films, but some genius ones as well. What I like about him is that there's no committee, they exist on their own terms, just like Ed Wood's films."

To help create a luxuriant and decadent atmosphere of his own, Strickland astutely chose his collaborators, including the duo Cat's Eyes, whose ethereal score, complete with faraway "la-la-la" vocals, effortlessly transports you to a world where it's normal to be punished for forgetting to wash a pair of undies, and cinematographer Nic Knowland, who also shot *Berberian*. "I saw the films Nic made with the Quay brothers – I'm a huge fan of theirs – and he has this very sensual approach that works well for what we're doing." Strickland also found that shooting in Hungary, and in particular the ruined villa transformed by his production designer Peter Sparrow, helped to establish his mood.

Along with the colour-saturated freeze-frames of his credits, a feast of zooms, the moth-winged dream sequences, Strickland accepts that he risks pastiche.

"Postmodernism has shifted so much in the last 20 years that nowadays people pretend to copy things that they haven't actually copied," he says, laughing. "I copy a lot. And I couldn't have done it before Tarantino. For me, to work within quotation marks is fine, as long as you're doing it to provide something with intensity, which gives the audience a ride. What I get from music, a lot, is that feeling of being transported into somebody else's world, and that's what I used to like about Greenaway's films, or Jarman's. That's what I'm trying to chase myself."

"But I know that if I keep copying it will become formulaic. So I'm trying hard to shed my skin and see if I can find my way in the dark without using all these stepping stones."

In that vein, he's embarking on a script, with development money from the BFI, about Romanians working in the UK. "It's a topic that is forming kidney stones in some of the electorate, but my sole motivation is that I want to work again with the actors from *Katalin Varga*, without having ticks sucking my ankles. I don't want to do a message film or pander to any ideology, I just want to do something a bit devious, really." ☀

 **The Duke of Burgundy** is released in UK cinemas on 20 February and is reviewed on page 74

Nowadays people pretend to copy things that they haven't actually copied... For me, to work within quotation marks is fine, as long as you're doing it to provide something with intensity



ANGELS AND INSECTS
Chiara D'Anna as lepidopterist Evelyn (below, left), and D'Anna with Sidse Babett Knudsen as Cynthia (below, right) in *The Duke of Burgundy*



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GORDON WILLIS



Visions of darkness: Gordon Willis's key work in the 1970s included (clockwise from top left) *All the President's Men*, *The Godfather*, *Manhattan* and *Klute*

A gifted cinematographer who defined the look of the New American Cinema of the 1970s



**28/5/1931 –
18/5/2014**

It was via Alan Pakula's peculiarly Presbyterian-in-mood thriller *Klute* (1971) that the cinematography of Gordon Willis made its first impact on me. Many things that were to become more fashionable and even ubiquitous as the 1970s wore on were captured early there: admiration and nostalgia for stripped-back *film noir*, a superficial but quintessentially New York interest in psychotherapy and a villain who proves to be a serial killer – then a term yet to be coined. *Klute* begins with the disappearance of a business executive and the one link to a possible motive is a packet of explicit letters he wrote to call girl Bree Daniels (Jane Fonda). Private detective John Klute (Donald Sutherland, riding the crest of his *M.A.S.H.* wave), is hired, and starts snooping on Daniels in a creepy kind of way that leads to a strangely distant romance. Willis's famous propensity for lighting dark interiors is exemplified when Daniels, wearing a glittering catsuit, comes to visit the owner of a dressmaking shop in his darkened premises. The

owner at his desk is simply lit for his face and shirt, with glass objects picking up points of light. Daniels walks towards the camera along a defined corridor between the machinery; a quick side-on tracking shot has her semi-silhouetted against long fluorescent tubes and she too only picks up one or two reflections on her figure. Everything moody that's in *The Godfather*'s famous "we'll make him an offer he can't refuse" interior is already here except that you can see the eyes, whereas with Brando and co, they are heavily shadowed, partly for obvious metaphorical reasons.

The Godfather (1972) is, of course, the film that cemented Willis's reputation – his ability to move from a sun-drenched outdoor wedding to those gloomy consultations inside, and his use of the magic hour to signify the flashback-to-the-1920s sequences in *The Godfather Part II* (1974) all contributed to the imposing textual richness of that series. In that sense our whole idea of what the New American Cinema of the 1970s looked like, its constant fishing for moral ambiguities, owes him a heavy debt.

Fellow DP Conrad Hall called him "The Prince of Darkness", but his own assessment

Willis saw himself as a minimalist who tried always to find the simplest way to make a scene work

was that he was a minimalist who tried always to find the simplest way to make a scene work, often adding no lighting to outdoor scenes at all. *Klute* was the first part of Pakula's so-called 'paranoia trilogy', which included *The Parallax View* (1974) and *All the President's Men* (1976). The latter, with its heightened feel for insalubrious locations, virtually defined how conspiracy thrillers would look thereafter.

But perhaps more than for his work with Coppola and Pakula, Willis was known for his eight-film association with Woody Allen, and indeed, given the extent to which Willis liked to get involved in the structure and space of a film – he was always looking for the contrasts from scene to scene that make editing easier – he can perhaps take a lot of the credit for the artistry of Allen's golden period: starting with *Annie Hall* (1977), through *Interiors* (1978), *Manhattan* (1979), *Stardust Memories* (1980), *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* (1982), *Zelig* (1983), *Broadway Danny Rose* (1984) to *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985). *Manhattan*, in particular, with its superb choice of anamorphic widescreen black-and-white images, is usually thought of as the quintessential film to capture the romance of that island.

Willis's imagery is stamped indelibly on the memory of those who watched cinema during the 1970s and 80s, and it seems likely that many of his films will haunt the collective memories of future generations. **© Nick James**

January to December 2014

Compiled by Bob Mastrangelo



Denotes an extended obituary
at bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

LATE 2013

Ernest Ansorge, 88: Swiss filmmaker who was a pioneer of sand-based animation (*Fantasmatic; Anima; Sabbath*).

Alan Bridges, 86: distinguished TV director whose film work includes the Palme d'Or winner *The Hireling* and the period drama *The Shooting Party*.

Ted Richmond, 103: veteran producer, active for four decades (*Solomon and Sheba; Papillon*).

Harold Whitaker, 93: animator who had a long tenure with Halas & Batchelor (*Animal Farm*) and co-authored the influential book *Timing for Animation*.

ACTORS

Alfredo Alcón, 84: Argentine actor in films for Leopoldo Torre Nilsson (*Summer Skin; Martín Fierro*).

Mary Anderson, 96: *ingénue* of the 1940s (*Lifeboat; To Each His Own*).

Alex Angulo, 61: Spanish actor who starred as the priest in de la Iglesia's *The Day of the Beast* and played the doctor in *Pan's Labyrinth*.

Renée Asherson, 99: actress who was Katherine to Olivier's *Henry V* and love interest to John Mills in *The Way to the Stars*.

Awaji Keiko, 80: Japanese actress who made her debut as Harumi the showgirl in *Stray Dog* and made five films for Naruse (*When a Woman Ascends the Stairs*).

Lauren Bacall, 89: glamorous Hollywood star whose on- and off-screen romance with Bogart was the stuff of legend (*To Have and Have Not; The Big Sleep; The Mirror Has Two Faces*).

Donatas Banionis, 90: Lithuanian actor who was Kris Kelvin in Tarkovsky's *Solaris*.

Polly Bergen, 84: played Gregory Peck's wife in the original *Cape Fear* and the first female US president in *Kisses for My President*.

Jacques Bergerac, 87: French actor in Hollywood in the 1950s and 60s (Minnelli's *Gigi; The Hypnotic Eye*).

Karlheinz Böhm, 86: German actor who escaped colourless romantic leads to play the murderer in *Peeping Tom* and four roles for Fassbinder.

Cornell Borchers, 89: German actress who was leading lady to Montgomery Clift in *The Big Lift* and starred in the Ealing drama *The Divided Heart*.

Malgorzata Braunek, 67: Polish actress in films for Wajda, Jerzy Hoffman and then-husband Zulawski.

Dora Bryan, 91: versatile entertainer, seen in films in support (*The Fallen Idol*), with a notable triumph in *A Taste of Honey*.

Marilyn Burns, 65: 1970s scream queen known for playing the lead in Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.

Sid Caesar, 91: TV pioneer and sketch comic who struggled to adapt his style to films (*It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World; Silent Movie*).

Ann Carter, 77: played the lonely child at the centre of *The Curse of the Cat People* and was Bogart's daughter in *The Two Mrs. Carrolls*.

Warren Clarke, 67: burly character actor of film (*A Clockwork Orange; Firefox*) and TV (*Dalziel & Pascoe*).

Ruby Dee, 91: actress and civil rights activist whose roles frequently defied racial stereotyping (*A Raisin in the Sun; Do the Right Thing; American Gangster*).

Lorella De Luca, 73: Italian *ingénue* of the 1950s (*Risi's Poor but Beautiful*), later in the films of her husband Duccio Tessari (*A Pistol for Ringo*).

Yolande Donlan, 94: actress in the films of her husband, Val Guest (*Mr. Drake's Duck; Penny Princess*).

Edna Doré, 92: character actress with a handful of standout film roles (*High Hopes; Nil by Mouth*).

Hal Douglas, 89: gravel-voiced narrator of film trailers who was among the most recognisable voices in his field.

Marie Dubois, 77: played Lena in *Shoot the Pianist*, then was largely seen in support (*Mon oncle d'Amérique*).

Mona Freeman, 87: blonde starlet of the 1940s and 50s, often typecast as teenagers (*Dear Ruth; Angel Face*).

James Garner, 86: handsome, easy-going star who was among the first to make the transition from TV to the big screen (*The Americanization of Emily; Victor Victoria; Murphy's Romance*).

Edward Herrmann, 71: commanding character actor (*Reds; The Purple Rose of Cairo*).

Philip Seymour Hoffman, 46: chameleon-like actor who built a major body of work over less than 20 years (*Capote; Synecdoche, New York; The Master*).

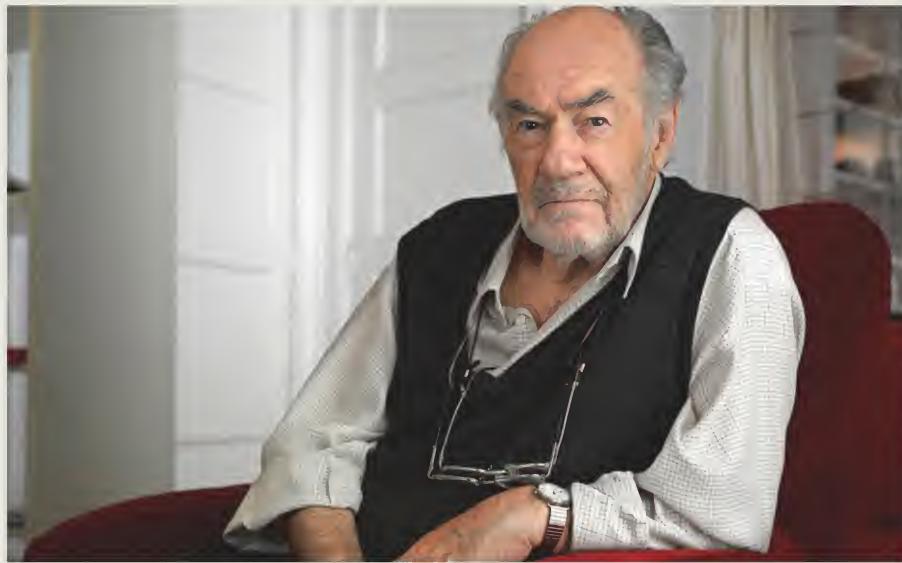
Bob Hoskins, 71: explosive actor who could play menacing or tender, with an unexpected talent for comedy (*The Long Good Friday; Mona Lisa; Who Framed Roger Rabbit*).

Wendy Hughes, 61: leading actress who rose to prominence during the Australian New Wave (*My Brilliant Career; Careful, He Might Hear You*).



DIRECTOR

GEORGE SLUIZER



25/6/1932 – 20/9/2014

Though the Dutch writer-director George Sluizer had a long, interesting career, he'll be remembered mostly for *Spoorloos* (1988), released internationally as *The Vanishing* – a remarkable, unsettling, suspenseful thriller with a genuinely Hitchcockian bent and fresh use of its European interzone milieu. The Dutch protagonist (Gene Bervoets) is haunted by the disappearance at a French motorway service station of his girlfriend (Johanna ter Steege) and devotes years to solving the mystery, which leads him to a French family man (Bernard Donnadieu) who has a particularly teasing brand of sociopathy. A complex philosophical puzzle with a nightmarish wind-up, *Spoorloos* is quietly terrifying, and ranks high among the best genre films of the 1980s.

Spoorloos was Sluizer's fourth fiction feature after *João and the Knife* (aka *John, the Knife and*

the River, 1971), *Twice a Woman* (1979) and *Red Desert Penitentiary* (1985). He had also made *Love and Music* (aka *Stamping Ground*, 1971), a Woodstock-style documentary about a concert in Rotterdam. With the international success of *Spoorloos*, he began working in English – a British adaptation of Bruce Chatwin's novel *Utz* (1992); a compromised Hollywood remake of *The Vanishing* (1993), with a happier ending and one of Jeff Bridges's more bizarre performances; the interesting British-made reality TV/serial-killer drama *Crimetime* (1996), with Pete Postlethwaite and Stephen Baldwin; and *The Commissioner* (1997), a paranoia movie with John Hurt as an embattled EU official.

An odd footnote is that in 1993 Sluizer directed *Dark Blood*, the horror film shut down by River Phoenix's premature death; more than 20 years on, a reconstructed version of the film finally appeared. **Kim Newman**

- Martha Hyer**, 89: actress who was William Holden's fiancée in Wilder's *Sabrina* and the schoolteacher Sinatra falls for in *Some Came Running*.
- Herb Jeffries**, 100: vocalist for Duke Ellington and a singing cowboy in musicals for black audiences (*Harlem on the Prairie; The Bronze Buckaroo*).
- Gottfried John**, 72: German actor who was used by Fassbinder (*Berlin Alexanderplatz*) and was also a Bond villain (*GoldenEye*).
- Christopher Jones**, 72: actor who quit the profession on the brink of stardom (*Wild in the Streets; Ryan's Daughter*).
- Dickie Jones**, 87: child actor who provided the voice for Disney's *Pinocchio* and in his twenties appeared in westerns (*Rocky Mountain*).
- Bill Kerr**, 92: Australian radio comic who became a reliable character actor (*The Wrong Arm of the Law; Gallipoli*).
- Richard Kiel**, 74: towering actor, memorable as Jaws in *The Spy Who Loved Me* and *Moonraker*.
- Hansi Knoteck**, 99: German Ufa star, popular in the 1930s (*Zigeunerbaron; Sirk's Das Mädchen vom Moorhof*).
- Elina Labourdette**, 95: French actress with prominent roles for Bresson (*Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*) and Demy (*Lola*).
- Yvette Lebon**, 103: co-star with Josephine Baker and Jean Gabin in *Zouzou* and Sacha Guitry in *Le Destin fabuleux de Désirée Clary*.
- Virna Lisi**, 78: beautiful Italian actress, in international productions (*Eva; How to Murder Your Wife; Queen Margot*).
- Audrey Long**, 92: actress in 1940s and early 50s B pictures, known for her film noir roles (*Wise's Born to Kill; Mann's Desperate*).
- Joan Lorring**, 88: ingénue who supported Bette Davis in *The Corn Is Green* and Peter Lorre and Sydney Greenstreet in *Three Strangers* and *The Verdict*.
- Francis Matthews**, 86: played TV's *Paul Temple* and co-starred in the Hammer films *The Revenge of Frankenstein* and *Dracula Prince of Darkness*.
- Juanita Moore**, 99: actress who gave a heartbreakingly Oscar-nominated performance as Annie in Sirk's *Imitation of Life*, but found subsequent film opportunities limited.
- Rosemary Murphy**, 89: character actress who was the supportive neighbour in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Dorothy Parker in *Julia*.
- Barbara Murray**, 84: postwar leading lady, largely lost to television starting in the 1960s (*Passport to Pimlico; Meet Mr. Lucifer*).
- Elizabeth Peña**, 55: distinctive, throaty actress who was the leading lady in *Jacob's Ladder* and *Lone Star*.
- Marc Platt**, 100: dancer who was featured in *Tonight and Every Night* and as one of the Pontipees in *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*.
- Luise Rainer**, 104: won consecutive Best Actress Oscars, but soon largely abandoned film acting (*The Great Ziegfeld; The Good Earth*).
- James Rebhorn**, 65: character actor often seen as unsympathetic or untrustworthy men of authority (Brest's *Scent of a Woman*; Emmerich's *Independence Day*).
- Terry Richards**, 81: stuntman whose credits include several Bond films and, most memorably, playing the Arab swordsman shot

ACTOR

BILLIE WHITELAW

6/6/1932 – 21/12/2014

Billie Whitelaw was far better known for her stage work than for her films. Understandably so – her partnership with Samuel Beckett alone would secure her a place as one of the great stage actors of our age. ('Partnership' seems justified: Beckett called her his "perfect actress" and crafted several roles specifically for her.) But she appeared in nearly 50 films, and about as many TV dramas – and if few of them were any great shakes, they were enhanced by the warmth of her presence.

For the most part, Whitelaw herself was generally dismissive of her screen roles, especially the early ones. "For young actresses in British films of the mid-Fifties," she noted in her autobiography, *Billie Whitelaw... Who He?*, "it seemed to be obligatory to run around in briefs, squeaking in a high-pitched voice, preferably with a 'common' accent." Her first serious film, she reckoned, was Ralph Thomas's political drama *No Love for Johnnie* (1960), about a rising Labour MP (Peter Finch) who ruins his career through his infatuation for a much younger model (Mary Peach). Whitelaw was his neighbour in the next-door flat, so touchingly open to him that it was evident Finch's character had made a howlingly wrong choice. The role could have been negligible, but Whitelaw seized "my first opportunity in films to etch out a characterisation".

by Indiana Jones in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

Mickey Rooney, 93: see box, page 53.

Tatiana Samoilova, 80: glamorous Soviet actress who starred in two films for Kalatozov (*The Cranes Are Flying; Letter Never Sent*) and played the title role in Zarkhi's *Anna Karenina*.

Maximilian Schell, 83: Austrian actor who found success in Hollywood (*Judgment at Nuremberg; Julia*) and also directed (*Marlene*).

There was a generous sensuality in her eyes and in the set of her mouth that fitted her to play passionate women, and even small roles drew on her forthright openness. She could do evil when called upon, of course – she was unforgettable savaging Gregory Peck as Mrs Baylock, the nanny from hell in *The Omen* (1976), "the only smash hit I've ever been in" – but was better used when her innate empathy could be put to more ambiguous ends. As Violet, devoted Cockney mum in *The Krays* (1990), she serves up tea and biscuits to visitors while fiercely protecting her beloved psychopathic "boys" against the least hint of criticism – genuinely warm, selflessly maternal, and a monster.

Whitelaw established a good rapport with Albert Finney – they were long-term friends, and briefly lovers – and her two films with him were among her best. She was his embittered ex-wife in his sole big-screen directorial venture, *Charlie Bubbles* (1967), and his rather more sympathetic sister-in-law in *Gumshoe* (1971), "in which Albert and I played a sort of parody Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall". In John Boorman's *Leo the Last* (1969) "for the first and only time I played a first-class bitch" and clearly rather enjoyed it. In recent years her movie work tailed off, but she put in one last, relishably eccentric performance as the machine-gun-toting hotelier in *Hot Fuzz* (2007).  **Philip Kemp**

Zohra Sehgal, 102: supporting actress, in her native India (*Cheeni Kum*) and Britain (*Bhaji on the Beach*).

Suchitra Sen, 82: one of Bengali cinema's greatest stars, who also worked in Bollywood (*Saptapadi; Aandhi*).

James Shigeta, 85: one of the first Asian-American actors to play romantic leads in Hollywood (*Bridge to the Sun; Flower Drum Song*).

Donald Sinden, 90: veteran actor whose film roles were more sporadic after the 1950s (*The Cruel Sea; Tiger in the Smoke*).
Elaine Stritch, 89: brassy Broadway star who appeared in support in films (1957's *A Farewell to Arms; September*).
Sugawara Bunta, 81: Japanese actor who starred in the yakuza series *Battles Without Honour and Humanity*.
Takakura Ken, 83: tough, stoic Japanese actor, often in yakuza films (*Abashiri Prison; The Yellow Handkerchief*).
Shirley Temple Black, 85: golden-curled moppet who lifted spirits during the Depression as one of Hollywood's biggest stars (*Bright Eyes; The Little Colonel; Wee Willie Winkie*).
Misty Upham, 32: Blackfeet actress who gained attention for her roles in *Frozen River* and *August: Osage County*.
Birgitta Valberg, 97: Swedish actress who played the mother in *The Virgin Spring* and starred in Gunnar Lindblom's *Paradisorg*.
Elena Varzi, 87: Italian actress, associated with neorealism and often appearing with her husband Raf Vallone (*The Path of Hope; Rome 11:00*).
Eli Wallach, 98: founding member of the Actors Studio who showed tremendous range in a long career on stage and screen (*Baby Doll; The Magnificent Seven; The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*).
Billie Whitelaw, 82: see box, page 50.
José Wilker, 69: Brazilian actor who played the dead husband in *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands* and starred in several films for Carlos Diegues (*Bye Bye Brasil*).
Robin Williams, 63: brilliant improv comic who from the 1980s became a top film star (*Good Morning, Vietnam; Mrs. Doubtfire; Good Will Hunting*).
Wu Ma, 71: leading character actor of Hong Kong cinema (*A Chinese Ghost Story*), who also directed (*The Deaf and Mute Heroine*).
Patrice Wymore, 87: leading lady of the 1950s (*Tea for Two; Rocky Mountain*) and the widow of Errol Flynn.
Yamaguchi Yoshiko (aka Li Xianglan/Ri Koran), 94: actress-singer who starred in propaganda films during Japan's occupation of China, Japanese films of the postwar period, and Hollywood films of the 1950s.
Yasui Shoji, 85: Japanese actor who played the obsessed soldier at the centre of Ichikawa's *The Burmese Harp*.
Efrem Zimbalist Jr., 95: TV veteran (*The F.B.I.*), occasionally in films (*Band of Angels; Wait Until Dark*).

ANIMATORS

Jimmy Teru Murakami, 80: American-born animator, based for many years in Ireland (*The Snowman; When the Wind Blows*).
Michael Sporn, 67: filmmaker who started his career with the Hubleys and became an important voice in independent animation (*Doctor DeSoto; Lyle, Lyle Crocodile: The Musical*).

CINEMATOGRAPHERS

Gerry Fisher, 88: versatile cinematographer, frequently for Losey (*Accident; The Go-Between*).
Jan Laskowski, 86: Polish cinematographer for

Tadeusz Konwicki (*The Last Day of Summer*) and Jerzy Kawalerowicz (*Night Train*).
Morita Fujio, 86: Japanese cinematographer noted for his work with Hideo Gosha (*Onimasa; The Oil-Hell Murder*).
V.K. Murthy, 90: cinematographer who brought a greater realism to Indian cinema through his collaboration with Guru Dutt (*Pyaasa; Kaagaz Ke Phool*).
Oswald Morris, 98: renowned cinematographer who often gave a film its own distinctive look (Huston's *Moulin Rouge; The Spy Who Came in from the Cold; Fiddler on the Roof*).
Saito Takao, 85: Japanese cinematographer who frequently worked with Kurosawa and was nominated for an Oscar for *Ran* in 1986.
Carlo Varini, 67: Swiss cinematographer who helped create the look of Luc Besson's early features (*Le Dernier Combat; The Big Blue*).
Gordon Willis, 82: see box, page 48.

COMPOSERS & MUSICIANS

John Cacavas, 83: composer for TV and film (*Horror Express; Airport 1975*).
Antoine Duhamel, 89: French composer who worked with Godard (*Pierrot le Fou*), Truffaut (*Stolen Kisses*) and Tavernier (*Death Watch*).

PRODUCER

RUN RUN SHAW

23/11/1907 – 7/1/2014

Run Run Shaw may be known for running a studio that has produced more than 1,000 films, nurturing talents such as King Hu, John Woo and Chow Yun-fat, and even for co-producing *Blade Runner* (1982) – but this only begins to describe the import of his work. His recent death, at 106, came after a remarkable 80-plus-year career in which he was both participant and witness to the evolution of the medium. From his early days working at his brothers' cinemas, to founding Shaw Brothers Studios and Television Broadcasts Ltd (TVB), Shaw's astute business sensibility not only helped usher in technological and operational developments to the Chinese-language media industry, but also defined a brand of populist entertainment that remains influential today.

Born to an affluent merchant family, Shaw began his career as a teenager at his brothers' Shanghai-based production company, Tianyi, a pioneer of the first Chinese-language sound films such as *The Platinum Dragon* (1932). He helped establish Tianyi's exhibition channels in South East Asia before the company relocated to Hong Kong during wartime. Shaw eventually took over the production business and renamed it Shaw Brothers (HK) Ltd in 1958.

He built up and scrupulously ran the fully integrated Shaw Movie Town, known for its prodigious output and often referred to as the "Hollywood of the East". The studio arguably owes its success to Shaw's responsiveness to audience tastes. "I can guess what [audiences] want, better than other producers... I guessed wrong many times, but I guessed a lot of times

Giorgio Gaslini, 84: Italian jazz musician-composer who also wrote film scores (Antonioni's *La Notte*; Argento's *Deep Red*).

Antony Hopkins, 93: composer, musician and broadcaster who scored some films (1952's *The Pickwick Papers; Billy Budd*).

Riz Ortolani, 87: prolific, versatile Italian composer (*Il sorpasso*) whose theme for *Mondo Cane* became a popular standard.

Ken Thorne, 90: composer, conductor and musical director, noted for his work with Richard Lester (*Help!; A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*).

DIRECTORS

Richard Attenborough, 90: titan of British cinema, as actor (*Brighton Rock*), director-producer (*Oh! What a Lovely War; Gandhi*), BFI chairman and arts advocate.

Gabriel Axel, 95: Danish director celebrated for his culinary classic *Babette's Feast*.

 **Peter von Bagh**, 71: Finnish filmmaker (*Helsinki, Forever*), film historian, archivist, festival director, editor of *Filmihullu*, and dedicated cinephile.

Malik Bendjelloul, 36: Swedish director of hit documentary *Searching for Sugar Man*. 



right," Shaw reflected in a 1972 interview. These insights helped Shaw Brothers capture the burgeoning domestic and overseas Chinese-language film market, and also forged TVB's operational strategy following its founding in the late 1960s. The free-to-air channel is now one of the largest commercial Chinese-language television producers in the world.

While Shaw Brothers produced films in various popular genres – from *The Magnificent Concubine* (1962) to musicals such as *Hong Kong Nocturne* (1967) – it is best known for its wuxia films, such as *Come Drink with Me* (1966). The studio's international appeal also stems from employing non-Chinese filmmakers, such as Japan's Inoue Umetsugu, and collaborating with overseas companies, such as Hammer Studios for *The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires* (1974).

Along with his cinematic legacy, Shaw will be remembered for his ostentatious public persona and generous philanthropy.  **Chanel Kong**

- Jean-Louis Bertuccelli**, 71: award-winning French director (*Ramparts of Clay; Docteur Françoise Gaillard*).
Noel Black, 77: director of the cult film *Pretty Poison* who spent much of his career working in TV.
Henning Carlsen, 86: Danish director who attacked apartheid in *Dilemma* and had an arthouse hit with *Hunger*.
Vera Chytilová, 85: provocative filmmaker and feminist voice of the Czech New Wave (*Daisies; The Apple Game*).
Eduardo Coutinho, 80: one of Brazil's most influential documentary filmmakers, known internationally for *Twenty Years Later*.
Assi Dayan, 68: Israeli actor (*He Walked Through the Fields*) and director (*Life According to Agfa*).
Peter de Rome, 89: filmmaker who was a pioneer of gay underground cinema (*Hot Pants; Adam & Yves*).
Robert Drew, 90: documentary filmmaker and one of the fathers of Direct Cinema (*Primary; Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment*).
Harun Farocki, 70: experimental German filmmaker of documentaries and video installations (*Inextinguishable Fire; Images of the World and the Inscription of War*).
Theodore J. Flicker, 84: writer-director of comedies (*The President's Analyst; Up in the Cellar*).
Robert Gardner, 88: anthropologist, filmmaker, longtime director of Harvard's Film Study Center and a pioneer of ethnographic cinema (*Dead Birds; Forest of Bliss*).
Michael Glawogger, 54: Austrian filmmaker known for his documentaries on poverty (*Megacities; Workingman's Death*).
William Greaves, 87: broadcast journalist and independent filmmaker who explored black history and culture (*Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One; The Fighters*).
Ramai Hayward, 98: globe-trotting Maori filmmaker and actress of documentaries and fictional works with her husband Rudall (*Children in China; To Love a Maori*).
Avraham Heffner, 79: leading Israeli director (*But Where Is Daniel Wax?; Laura Adler's Last Love Affair*).
Gordon Hessler, 88: director of some notable horror films (*Scream and Scream Again*) and the Ray Harryhausen fantasy *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*.
Brian G. Hutton, 79: actor-turned-director who had hits with the action films *Where Eagles Dare* and *Kelly's Heroes*.
Miklós Jancsó, 92: Hungarian director noted for a visual style that involved extreme long takes and elaborate choreography (*The Round-Up; The Red and the White; Red Psalm*).
Zsolt Kézdi-Kovács, 78: Hungarian director who apprenticed under Jancsó (*Temperate Zone; Forbidden Relations*).
Wolf Koenig, 86: filmmaker with half a century at Canada's National Film Board as director, producer, animator and cinematographer (*City of Gold; Lonely Boy*).
David Koff, 74: documentary filmmaker who brought an activist's zeal to his work (*Blacks Britannica; Occupied Palestine*).
Peter Liechti, 63: Swiss maker of documentaries,



Hall of mirrors: Alain Resnais on the set of *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961)

- cine-essays, travelogues and experimental films (*Signer's Suitcase; The Sound of Insects*).
Patrick Lung Kong, 79: Hong Kong actor and director who revived Cantonese cinema (*Story of a Discharged Prisoner; Teddy Girls*).
Paul Mazursky, 84: actor who reinvented himself as a writer-director with a satirical touch (*Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice; An Unmarried Woman; Enemies: A Love Story*).
Carlo Mazzacurati, 57: Italian writer-director, often of comedies (*Il toro; La passione*).
Andrew V. McLaglen, 94: director whose films, mostly westerns, embraced an old-fashioned sensibility (*McLintock!; Shenandoah*).
Mike Nichols, 83: director and performer who was a renaissance figure in comedy, theatre, television and film (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?; The Graduate; Working Girl*).
Harold Ramis, 69: a defining figure of American film comedy for more than quarter of a century, as director, writer and actor (*Caddyshack; Ghostbusters; Groundhog Day*).
Alain Resnais, 91: revered French filmmaker whose experimental narratives made him an arthouse darling (*Night and Fog; Hiroshima mon amour; Last Year at Marienbad*).
Panna Rittikrai, 53: veteran of Thai action cinema, as fight choreographer, stuntman, actor and director (*Ong-Bak: Muay Thai Warrior; Born to Fight*).
Helma Sanders-Brahms, 73: filmmaker with the New German Cinema who often explored social issues (*Shirin's Wedding; Germany, Pale Mother*).
Joseph Sargent, 89: directed the gritty 1970s New York thriller *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* and the biopic *MacArthur*.
George Sluizer, 82: see box, page 49.
Roland Verhavert, 87: filmmaker who was a major force in Belgian cinema (*The Conscript; Brugge, die stille*).
Wu Tianming, 74: director and studio executive who mentored Chinese cinema's Fifth Generation (*The Old Well; The King of Masks*).
EDITORS
Hans Funck, 61: leading German editor (*Downfall; Sophie Scholl: The Final Days*).
Nicole Lubtchansky: editor and a close collaborator of Jacques Rivette (*Out 1; Celine and Julie Go Boating; La Belle Noiseuse*).
Tom Rolf, 82: Swedish-born film editor in Hollywood (*Taxi Driver; The Right Stuff; Jacob's Ladder*).
PRODUCERS & STUDIO EXECUTIVES
Karl Baumgartner, 65: a leader of international arthouse cinema for more than 30 years, producing works by Kusturica, Kaurismäki, Denis, Jarmusch and Kim Ki-duk.
Chris Collins, 52: producer and executive with tenures at the UK Film Council and the BFI Film Fund (*My Summer of Love; Brick Lane*).
Arthur Gardner, 104: producer for film (*Without Warning; White Lightning*) and TV (*The Rifleman*).
Bernard Glasser, 89: independent producer, often of sci-fi (*Return of the Fly; The Day of the Triffids*).
Menahem Golan, 85: prolific producer and sometime director known for 1980s B-grade action (*The Delta Force*) and the occasional arthouse film (Cassavetes's *Love Streams*).
David Hannay, 74: New Zealand-born Australian producer (*Stone; The Man from Hong Kong*).
James Jacks, 66: producer of 1999's *The Mummy*, as well as key credits for the Coen brothers, Richard Linklater, Kevin Smith, John Woo and Sam Raimi.
Stanley Rubin, 96: producer (Fleischer's *The Narrow Margin; White Hunter, Black Heart*) and screenwriter who was also active in television.
Run Run Shaw, 106: see box, page 51.
Richard Shepherd, 86: executive with Warner

Bros and MGM, talent agent and producer (*The Hanging Tree; Breakfast at Tiffany's*).

Tom Sherak, 68: longtime executive of Twentieth Century Fox who also served as president of the Motion Picture Academy, steering it through a period of change.

Frank Yablans, 79: producer (*Silver Streak; Mommie Dearest*) and president of Paramount in the 1970s.

Saul Zaentz, 92: music industry executive who became a top independent film producer (*One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest; Amadeus; The English Patient*).

SCREENWRITERS

Daniel Boulanger, 92: French screenwriter (*That Man from Rio*) and actor (*A bout de souffle*).

L.M. Kit Carson, 73: screenwriter, actor, festival founder and mentor to independent filmmakers (*David Holzman's Diary; Paris, Texas*).

Everett De Roche, 67: American-born screenwriter of Australian cult horror (*Long Weekend; Razorback*).

Robert M. Fresco, 83: screenwriter of 1950s horror (*Tarantula*) and later a documentary filmmaker (*Czechoslovakia 1968*).

Vicente Leñero, 81: Mexican author and screenwriter (*The Bricklayers; The Crime of Father Amaro*).

Valeri Petrov, 94: author whose early work as a screenwriter helped shape Bulgarian cinema (*On a Small Island; Sun and Shadow*).

Lorenzo Semple Jr., 91: one of Hollywood's most sought-after screenwriters (*Pretty Poison; The Parallax View*), who also created TV's *Batman*.

SET & COSTUME DESIGNERS

Karel Černý, 92: Czech production designer known for his work with Milos Forman (*The Firemen's Ball; Amadeus*).

H.R. Giger, 74: Swiss artist who created nightmarish designs for several films, most famously the title creature for *Alien*.

Assheton Gorton, 84: production designer who tackled Swinging London, historical dramas and fantasy worlds (*Blowup; The French Lieutenant's Woman; Legend*).

George L. Little, 63: costume designer for *The Hurt Locker* and *Zero Dark Thirty*.

John J. Lloyd, 92: production designer and art director, busy both in TV (*Alfred Hitchcock Presents*) and film (*The Blues Brothers; Carpenter's The Thing*).

SOUND & SPECIAL EFFECTS

Danny Lee, 95: special effects artist who staged the blood-soaked finale of *Bonnie and Clyde* and worked on numerous Disney films (*Bedknobs and Broomsticks*).

Walt Martin, 69: sound mixer on more than a dozen Eastwood films, from *True Crime* to *American Sniper*.

James Nelson, 81: sound editor (*Two-Lane Blacktop; The Exorcist*) who helped build ILM for Lucas and later was a producer and post-production consultant.

Dick Smith, 92: master make-up artist who demonised Linda Blair for *The Exorcist* and aged Dustin Hoffman (*Little Big Man*) and F. Murray Abraham (*Amadeus*).

Joe Viskocil, 63: pyrotechnics effects artist who worked on the *Star Wars* and *Terminator* franchises and won an Oscar for Emmerich's *Independence Day*.

MISCELLANEOUS

Mary Lea Bandy, 71: long-time film archivist and curator with New York's Museum of Modern Art.

Anthony Goldschmidt, 71: graphic designer whose firm created numerous classic Hollywood poster and title designs.

Peter Harcourt, 82: scholar and author who helped to establish film studies in Canada and raised awareness of Canadian cinema.

Phil Hardy, 69: critic and journalist whose work on film includes the influential Aurum Film Encyclopedia series.

 **Jim Hillier**, 73: scholar at the BFI and Reading University and an innovator in film studies.

Hans Hillmann, 88: German graphic designer whose influential film posters made him a giant in the field.

Frederick I. Ordway III, 87: NASA scientist who played a critical role on *2001: A Space Odyssey* as Kubrick's trusted scientific consultant.

Phil Stern, 95: photographer who captured indelible images of Hollywood stars during the studio era.

Bob Thomas, 92: doyen of Hollywood journalists who covered Tinseltown for more than 60 years and wrote numerous biographies.

Mike Vraney, 56: founder of Something Weird Video and a tireless advocate for rescuing, preserving and distributing exploitation cinema. And **Derek Owen**, 65: friend and fellow film lover who generously provided feedback on drafts on this column each year for the past decade. 

ACTOR

MICKEY ROONEY

23/9/1920 – 6/4/2014

Collecting his award for lifetime achievement at the Oscars in 1983, Mickey Rooney observed of his front-loaded stardom:

"When I was 19 years old, I was the number one star. When I was 40, nobody wanted me." Yet his screen career had unparalleled longevity, spanning silent shorts (he debuted in 1926's *Not to Be Trusted*) to CGI-laden global success *Night at the Museum* (2006).

A Hollywood veteran at 14 as star of the 'Mickey McGuire' shorts, he started a 20-year career at MGM by playing the young Clark Gable in *Manhattan Melodrama* (1934). Loaned to Warner Bros for Max Reinhardt's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1935) his unearthly chuckling Puck showed artistry untapped when he was second banana to fellow child-star Freddie Bartholomew in films such as *Captains Courageous* (1937). His scrappy, brittle delinquent made a fine foil for Spencer Tracy's quiet power in *Boys Town* (1938), earning him a Juvenile Oscar shared with Deanna Durbin. But his most famous role was as uncrushable teenager Andy Hardy, in the 15-film series running from 1937 to 1948. So popular was this idealised portrait of American family life that Billy Wilder claimed to have seen Louis B. Mayer grab a misbehaving Rooney by the lapel and yell, "You're Andy Hardy. You're the United States. You're the Stars and Stripes. Behave yourself. You're a symbol."

Rooney's exuberance and musical versatility was teamed shrewdly with Judy Garland's vulnerable songbird for 'backyard musicals' *Babes in Arms* (1939), *Strike up the Band* (1940), *Babes on Broadway* (1941), and lastly *Girl Crazy* (1943) in which he spoofs himself deliciously. Yet he could dial down to great effect, as *The Human Comedy's* (1943) affectingly understated telegram boy, or in *National Velvet* (1944). He was surprisingly good as the short-statured sap in small-time



50s noirs such as *Quicksand* (1950) and *Drive a Crooked Road*, and his *Baby Face Nelson* (1957) was a revelatory pumped-up psychotic. Television gifted him great grotesques in 'The Comedian' (*Playhouse 90*, 1957) and the haunted self-hater of 'The Last Night of a Jockey' (*Twilight Zone*, 1963), when film could muster nothing better than caricatured Mr Yunioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961). A neat cod-Cagney turn in *Pulp* (1972) raised little dust, though his genial horse trainer in *The Black Stallion* (1979) earned him a Best Supporting Actor Oscar nomination.

Rooney's blizzard of late-life work yielded few gems, save his childlike TV-movie portrayal of mentally-impaired Bill (1981). Yet he worked on ceaselessly, his fleeting cameos as late as *The Muppets* (2011) and *Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb* (2014) the very personification of indefatigable Old Hollywood. After all, "I've never felt that what I do is 'work'." 

PREVIEW

LISTEN TO BRITAIN

A new exhibition unearths the Arts Council's film collection. For John Akomfrah, the selection is a portrait of post-war Britain

By Isabel Stevens

Who knew the Arts Council had a film collection? It's a diverse compilation of around 450 films, commissioned in collaboration with various bodies, including the BFI, the BBC and a number of independent production companies, between 1953 and 2000. Its staple – and the reason for its existence – is the arts documentary, an impoverished genre on television today, thanks to the dominance of a personality-led expository approach. But these modern programmes, and the dry term 'arts doc', have little to do with the imaginative audiovisual interpretations of art and artists that populate the Arts Council's unusual archive: films such as Stephen Dwoskin's atmospheric, monochrome portrait of Bill Brandt, *Shadows from Light* (1983), which prowls the photographer's flat, creating strange and delirious compositions of Brandt's photographs which

intensify their surrealism; artist home movies like Bruce Lacey's *The Lacey Rituals* (1972); a suitably scavenged film about Pop collagist Richard Hamilton which patches Hamilton's spoken words with movies, adverts and fragments of his images. But there are more curiosities which stray even further from the genre: essay films such as Judith Williamson's attack on advertising, *A Sign Is a Fine Investment* (1983); freewheeling dance films experimenting with the ways a camera can record a performance; and documentaries highlighting social and political issues, among them Peter Wyeth's *12 Views of Kensal House*, a wide-roving study of a London estate, even more pertinent now than it was in 1984. Due to complicated rights issues and the lack of funding for a publicly accessible platform for them, these films have rarely been seen since they were first shown on television, in cinemas, educational contexts, or at film societies and festivals. They have all now been given a permanent home in the BFI's archive.

From February to the end of April, a selection will be on display at the Hayward Gallery's exhibition 'History is Now: 7 Artists Take on Britain'. "We were told 'Get collections. Throw them together and see what you're interested in,'"

explains the filmmaker John Akomfrah, one of the curators of the show, who has focused on the Arts Council's collection as a way of investigating post-war Britain. From *Handsworth Songs*, one of his early films with the Black Audio Film Collective, to recent solo films like *The Nine Muses* and *The Stuart Hall Project*, Akomfrah has often mined and repurposed archive film footage. Even before the Hayward show, he had intended to make a film from and about the collection (he is keen to stress that this may still happen). With the other six artists choosing object-based collections at the Hayward, it provided the chance to move film, usually relegated to a supplementary programme in exhibitions like this, to centre stage. "What if the rummage is an audiovisual one? What else do you need to understand post-war Britain?" Akomfrah asks. "The installation will be a film jumble sale, in the best sense of the phrase."

My interest is in moving-image culture and that has disparate forms it can take, multiple venues in which it can come alive



Brandt awareness: Stephen Dwoskin's *Shadows from Light: The Photography of Bill Brandt* (1983)

Isabel Stevens: Why did you pick the ACE film collection?

John Akomfrah: This is a whole tradition that is now standing in the cold. If we don't do this, then they head into the vortex of academic research – I'm not rubbishing that, but it seems a sad end to work which had passion and energy and was advocating now-forgotten artforms and practices. There's a polemical thrust to what I'm trying to do, which is to reanimate a certain way of working that is gone now.

In the 90s there was the idea that Modernism never worked and was always a problem. But working with archives, I've been struck by how the experience of Modernism was incredibly liberating for so many people. A film like *12 Views from Kensal House* charts the whole thing – through filming a council estate, the whole post-war debate and the question of housing and the welfare state could be revisited. And Peter Wyeth does something that became a staple of these documentaries: complicated juxtapositions – views of the estate, archival footage and the testimonies of residents and the architect.

IS: What was the curatorial ethos behind your selection?

JA: Over a year and a half, I've watched almost every one of the films. There are lots of interesting things happening if you want to understand the evolution of the arts documentary from 1953 onwards. There are changing definitions of what constituted art practice – you essentially start with painting and sculpture and end up with performance and community arts. There are various indexes one could use to chart all sorts of things in the show. I've gone for the most modest one: the transformation from filmmaking trying to represent an artform to becoming the artform itself. As you get to Malcolm Le Grice's *Whitchurch Down* (1971), it's impossible to see anything other than the work itself. But I've tried to suggest that from the beginning there were films that were playing with this paradox.

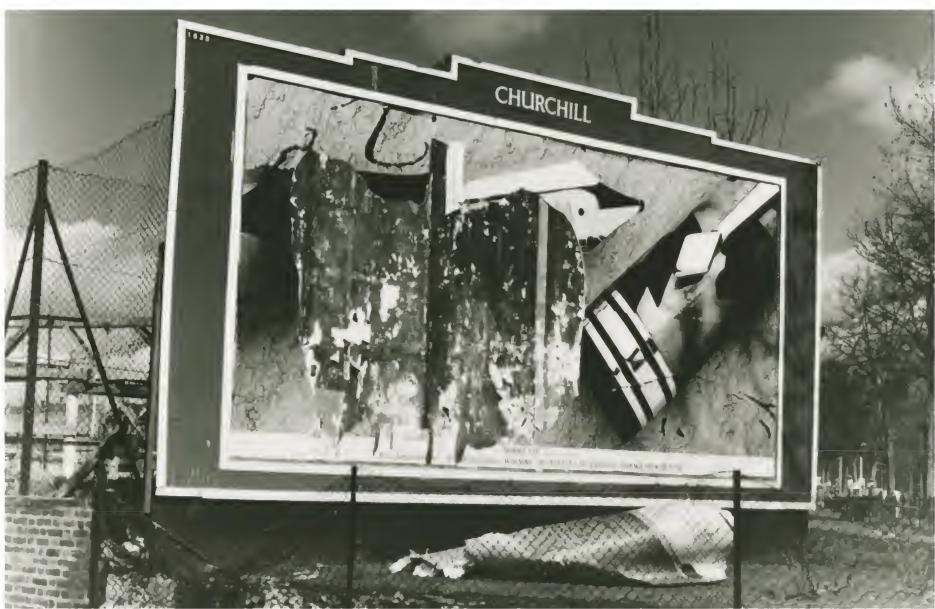
IS: You can see that in the films about Barbara Hepworth and Richard Hamilton.

JA: It's almost certainly there in the Francis Bacon film too. I'm not sure that the experience you get of his art in that film is possible in an exhibition setting. It displays all the tropes and grammar of cinema – pans, close-ups and all the rest of it. With the gliding shots in the Barbara Hepworth film, it's almost like watching *Lola Montés*, as if Max Ophuls was set loose in an art gallery.

The amnesia of the present suggests that certain forms of filmmaking are fetishised as new when in fact there are remarkable histories to their becoming. Watching Judith Williamson's film about advertising, *A Sign Is a Fine Investment*, suddenly made me think about what constitutes an essay film and the other trajectories that the filmmakers could have had.

IS: Did you see many of the films at the time?

JA: Most of them I saw afterwards but there were one or two I watched then that stuck with me, particularly Dwoskin's *Shadows from Light: The Photography of Bill Brandt*. That showed at the Metro cinema. And then it probably went on *The Eleventh Hour* on Channel 4, which had such a range of films from people like Jeff Keen, Cinema Action, even very experimental stuff from Peter



Attack advertising: Judith Williamson's *A Sign Is a Fine Investment* (1983)

Gidal. The Jeff Keen film by Margaret Williams I wanted because it tells you about the embrace of the arts documentary by television and the reach of those films back then. In the post-war project, television was one of the institutions that agreed to play its role. But now most TV is managed and manufactured. It must be possible to make it in two weeks and post it in six weeks. The challenge now is how to play outside of the tribe.

IS: Some of the works in the collection aren't arts docs at all but examples of very political filmmaking, such as the film about Winston Silcott [Rodreguez King-Dorset's *Winston Silcott – The Beard of Justice*, 1995] which protests against police brutality and prejudice.

JA: At the time the Silcott film was made, I was part of a panel that was making recommendations to the Arts Council that it should make those sorts of films. The sense of surprise that I got when I saw it hasn't changed. It's a perfect fusion. It's one of those pieces that deals seamlessly with all the nuances in Peter Wollen's [1975] article 'The two avant-gardes'. How do you make something politically valuable that isn't formally uninteresting? People always expect that to be answered by the Godards, the Angelopoulos. But occasionally it's someone who's not from that fraternity who brings their own answers to that. Here, it's both Rodreguez King-Dorset and Alnoor Dewshi. Dewshi's film *Latifah and Himli's Nomadic Uncle* [1992], about

the two girls discussing their heritage, is funny, urbane, charming, but deals with some really big, chunky issues about diaspora and identity.

IS: How will you show them at the Hayward?

JA: There are three platforms. One is almost a cinematic setting, where you can see them projected. Those have been transferred because I wanted people to get the kind of sense of impact I had when I watched them. In the larger space, there will be seven monitors and you'll be able to decide which one to pay attention to. Many of those films have already been shown on television so I didn't feel we would be doing them a disservice. There are two projected inside of that space – *Imprint*, 70 minutes of pure experimental cinema, a cut every three seconds, and *The World of Gilbert & George* [1981] – where you don't have to watch all 70 minutes.

IS: There are many cinephiles who hate seeing films with a beginning and an end shown in galleries. What's your response to them?

JA: My interest is in moving-image culture and that has disparate forms that it can take, multiple venues in which it can come alive. I have no more investment in cinema than in television or the gallery. Does that mean I want people to go into Victoria Miro and watch *Interstellar*? No. But do I think anyone watching Tarkovsky's *Mirror* there is wasting their time? No.

With YouTube and so on, the grand war between these two gladiators is over. It's not an either/or anymore. And that's got to be a good thing. If you gathered all of the filmmakers who are still alive from this selection and asked them if they made work in the same space, the vast majority would say no. We [Akomfrah and his regular collaborators] have been trying to have a hybrid existence for a while, but getting funding is like manoeuvring across ice plates; you move across one, you feel it wobbling and you jump over to the next one. ☀

i History Is Now: 7 Artists Take On Britain is at the Hayward Gallery, London, from 10 February to 26 April. Akomfrah's film selection is available to view on BFI Player



The World of Gilbert & George (1981)

THE DANCE OF UNREALITY

Alejandro Jodorowsky's film scores are as anarchic, derivative original and extraordinary as the films themselves, and more

By Frances Morgan

"I think there are multiple influences in *El Topo*," writes Alejandro Jodorowsky in the sleeve notes to Shades of Joy's 1970 album *Music of El Topo*. "The influence of all the books I've read and all the films I've seen, of all the winds that have blown against my skin, of all the stars that have exploded during my lifetime... of each flea that's shit on me. Especially a flea I met in 1955."

Music of El Topo is not the official soundtrack album to Jodorowsky's hallucinatory spaghetti western of the same year. I don't know what to call it because there isn't really much else like it: nowadays perhaps you'd call it a 'response' or something equally legitimising. I've heard it called a cover version of the film's original score, but it isn't quite that either. 'Music Inspired By...', maybe. Versions of the cues Jodorowsky composed for the film, in particular the main theme 'Under The Earth', are renamed, rearranged and played by Shades of Joy, a San Francisco fusion band led by saxophonist and flautist Martin Fierro and including Grateful Dead member Howard Wale. If the sleeve is to be believed, the director liked the interpretation enough to write a poem about it ("I was a seed/Watching itself grow on a tree/Knowing I was the tree,/But feeling/Apart from it"). His original music's clear debt to Morricone's western soundtracks – all those triumphant, melancholy horns with intervals that quote directly from *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* – alongside snippets of Bach (literally – he claimed to have cut up a score and stuck it back together in a different order) makes it clear, as if that were ever needed when it comes to Jodorowsky, that nothing is sacred, sonically or visually. Why not write a poem about a jazz-funk version of your already referential compositions? "Man can accomplish nothing by himself," intones the alchemist in Jodorowsky's follow-up, *The Holy Mountain* (1973). But the alchemist is played by Jodorowsky himself; he is at the centre of this free-for-all universe.

Jodorowsky is one of a small but significant band of film directors who have composed their own soundtracks. While this is often a pragmatic budgetary decision, it can yield remarkable music, such as John Carpenter's synthesiser score for *Halloween*, which gives the film its electrified starkness. David Lynch's musical contributions to *Inland Empire*, which sit alongside Penderecki and pop songs, contribute to a sense of that film as a kind of oneiric mixtape, collaged from strange remnants of abandoned projects and other barely remembered soundtracks. Like Carpenter's, Jodorowsky's scores were occasioned by financial necessity; but they also speak of the boundless self-belief that saw him not only star in *El Topo* and *The Holy Mountain* but, in the case of the latter film, design the costumes and sets. The resulting film is both daft and deeply strange, its intense Latin American setting lifting it out of the stoned complacency of other archetypal 'head' films set in California or London. It tells the story of a



El Topo goes pop: Alejandro Jodorowsky waxes melodic in his seminal feature

group of seekers who journey out of a dystopian Mexico City in search of enlightenment: it is hard to tell whether Jodorowsky is poking fun at the privileged global North's obsession with gurus and cults of personality or honing his own. But its grotesque pageantry works because it is total, everything, all at once, animals, blood, factories, rituals, colours and sounds, echoing the director's background in experimental theatre. Should the music be separated from a film that, even when it doesn't immerse the viewer, never leaves you in any doubt that this is what it's trying to do?

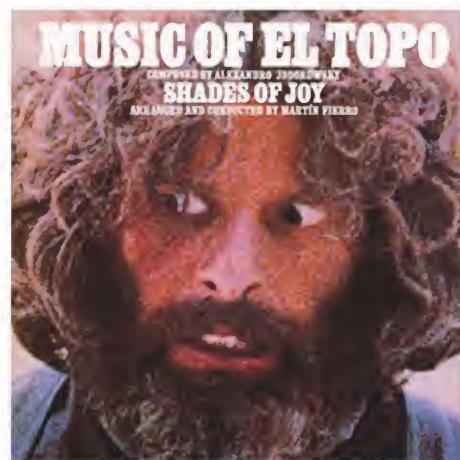
Perhaps there is a point at which a cult film no

Perhaps listening to music from a cult flick is a way to absorb its atmosphere without having to sit through the whole thing again

longer needs to be watched – it can be enough to talk about it, read about it and listen to its soundtrack. Although there are many reasons why the reissue market for cult film soundtracks has burgeoned lately, I wonder if it is partly because listening to the music from a vintage



Jodorowsky in *The Holy Mountain*



The cover for Shades of Joy's *Music of El Topo*

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA



A trip to the Falklands' World War I commemorations is the latest far-flung outing for a BFI silent-film restoration

By Bryony Dixon

Is the world getting smaller? It is supposed to be, but it didn't feel like it staring from my window for hour after hour over a vast stretch of ocean with nothing but blue water to see. It felt very big indeed. I was on my way by RAF plane (visions of dusty-floored holds and gun emplacements giving way to an unromantic but comfortable modern airbus) to show a silent film to the small population of a remote group of islands in the South Atlantic, a gloriously odd opportunity of a lifetime. *The Falkland Islands 1914 Centenary Committee* wanted to show the BFI's restoration of *The Battles of Coronel and Falkland Islands* (1927) as part of the Islanders' commemorations of their connection with the events portrayed in the film, 100 years ago.

This 'best British war film you've never heard of' has extra meaning in the Falklands – as a community inhabiting disputed territory, it has to take its history seriously, particularly since the war of 1982. The Islands may be remote but they were (and are) geopolitically and strategically important as the only bit of land in a big bit of sea at a crucial point between two oceans (and now because of oil too). The two World War I naval battles that are the subject of the film had a direct impact on the Islanders, as British and German navy squadrons clashed first on the Pacific side of Cape Horn, near the Chilean city of Coronel, then on the Atlantic side as the German Admiral von Spee headed for the Falklands hoping to destroy Britain's coal stores and radio station. After the first battle, the Islanders cared for the wounded of HMS Glasgow, which limped in after the loss of the British flagship HMS Good Hope and HMS Monmouth. Rear-Admiral Cradock, who went down with his ship, was commemorated with a plaque in Christ Church cathedral in the Falklands' capital Port Stanley, also the site of the centenary screening. The Islands' defence force was then instrumental in preparing to defend the fuel and radio mast as well as the town from destruction by the German fleet.

Walter Summers's film was made only nine years after the end of the war, beyond immediate grieving but still fresh enough in the memory for it to touch those who saw it. The director was careful to depict everyone involved in the events, from the humblest stoker to the first lord of the Admiralty. The film's central montage, called 'The Effort', shows the massive national undertaking to ready the great battle cruisers to steam south to avenge Coronel. That filmic tableau of all the cogs in the human machine pulling together is one of the finest sequences in British film history and a milestone in the history of the

The film's central montage, 'The Effort', is one of the finest sequences in British film history



The Battles of Coronel and Falkland Islands (1927)

commemoration of World War I; the device has been imitated in war movies ever since.

Eighty-six years on, the film has acquired a fresh set of meanings for a new generation – to most of us, it is a piece of interesting national history, involving near-forgotten events made accessible by good filmmaking. For the Islanders attending the screening it was also a special act of remembrance for a community that has strong bonds with the Royal Navy, still on constant patrol in its waters. In the presence of descendants of the admirals Cradock, Sturdee and von Spee, the memorial events were also an opportunity for reconciliation between former adversaries. The scrupulous fairness of the film in its treatment of the Germans was helpful in that regard.

The Falklands haven't featured much on our screens since, with the exception of dramas about the 1982 war such as *Tumbledown* (1988) and *An Ungentlemanly Act* (1992), and the limited amount of news footage of the war. The landscape hasn't changed round Port Stanley. The hills still look like they were designed to blend with British military camouflage colours rather than the other way around. The pale green and dun-coloured tundra is reminiscent of the Outer Hebrides and the gritty road from Mount Pleasant military base to Stanley is still festooned with cheerful red flags on barbed wire (which I mentally dubbed 'the devil's bunting'), marking out the still-live Argentinian minefields. It's one of few signs of human impact in a landscape that is otherwise left to the grass and the moss and colonies of penguins on pristine white sand beaches, minding their own business.

In the past few years, the BFI has sent its silent film restorations further afield than ever before: the nine Hitchcock silents played in Shanghai; *Blackmail* (1929) screened to a crowd of 15,000 on the Odessa Steps in Ukraine; *The Epic of Everest* (1924) was viewed on a plane flying over the peak itself; and *The Great White Silence* (1924) was screened at the South Pole. My journey to show *The Battles of Coronel and Falkland Islands* to our cousins on the far side of the world was worth every one of its 7,877 miles. ☺

The Battles of Coronel and Falkland Islands is out now on Blu-ray and DVD

horror, psychedelic folly or exploitation flick is one way to absorb its atmosphere and get a hit of its presence without having to sit through the whole thing all over again, wrestling with slight boredom, the diminishing returns that come with too many viewings and the realisation that you can't quite countenance all the gratuitous sex and violence any more, even if it is rendered in vintage tones. Manchester-based Finders Keepers is one of the most consistent among a number of labels now enabling us to build alternative canons of film music. Shortly to release the soundtracks to *El Topo*, *The Holy Mountain* and 2013's *The Dance of Reality* (scored by Alejandro's youngest son, Adam Jodorowsky, who also acted in his 1989 film *Santa sangre*), the label has already put out carefully curated LPs of film music by Bruno Nicolai and Luboš Fišer, as well as numerous rare soundtracks by Andrzej Korzynski.

Listened to in isolation from its visuals, *El Topo*'s official soundtrack can sound even more generic than it was perhaps meant to – oddly, the Shades of Joy album conveys the film's energy, or maybe its cultural status, far more effectively. For me, the film's most memorable sonic moments are not found in the musical score but where sound is used to absurd effect: in one scene, the hero and three bandits count down to a duel using the whistle of air escaping from a balloon as the cue to draw their pistols. *The Holy Mountain* – although its music is a queasy mix of emotive pop-orchestral themes, weird rock and synth interludes, free jazz and Eastern-tinged drones and chants – works better as a record in its own right, reminiscent in places of the radical bricolage of old and new music (folk, bossa nova, classical symphonies and baroque pop) that characterised Brazil's Tropicália music in the late 1960s. The soundtrack is credited in the film to three people – Jodorowsky, arranger and film composer Ron Frangipane, and trumpeter and multi-instrumentalist Don Cherry, whose influence remains one of the film's most potent aspects. To an extent, the Finders Keepers release restores this balance. On the covers of previous releases, Jodorowsky's name loomed way larger than Cherry's: even pieces that are obviously Cherry's – such as the cue for 'Isla (The Sapphic Sleep)', whose melody can be heard on Cherry's *Organic Music Society* album, recorded the same year – were credited to the director. No release has made the effort to name the numerous improvising musicians who contribute hand drums, tambura and countless other evocative sounds to tracks such as 'Tarot Will Teach You/Burn Your Money' and the fantastically heavy 'Rainbow Room'. Few examples highlight the difference between the meticulous cataloguing of jazz discographies and the anarchic, DIY nature of cult film soundtracks – not to mention the cult of Jodo – than *The Holy Mountain*'s soundtrack. When those soundtracks are repackaged and presented in ever more ostentatiously official ways, as they increasingly are, those differences and gaps and mysteries become all the more pronounced, enticing for some and infuriating for others. ☺

i **FindersKeepers** is releasing the original soundtracks of *El Topo*, *The Holy Mountain* and *The Dance of Reality* on vinyl only in late March

STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD

Experimental filmmaking – and programming – remains the order of the day at Belgrade's venerable Alternative Film/Video Festival

By Neil Young

Belgrade's Alternative Film/Video Festival was my 26th and last film festival of 2014 – and in some ways the best of the bunch. With all screenings gratis and sponsorship eschewed, it was the one least sullied by commerce, compromise or questionable notions of artistic competition; the one that seemed most unambiguously motivated by pure, old-school cinephilia. And while many festivals devote sections to avant-garde programming and/or take an experimental approach to their programming (FIDMarseille comes to mind), to find one entirely given over to this marginalised sphere is dispiritingly rare.

After Oberhausen, which was founded in 1954, and Michigan's Ann Arbor Film Festival (1962), Alternative Film/Video (AFV), which started in 1982, is probably the oldest such event in the world. Then as now, it was organised by the Academic Film Centre (AFC) at the Culture House in the Student City neighbourhood of New Belgrade. Dominating the horizon here is an infinitely more extravagant relic of the heyday of Yugoslav socialism: the brutalist twin towers of the 115 metre Western City Gate. Architect Mihajlo Mitrović's outlandish example of science-fiction architecture has greeted drivers on the E-75 motorway since 1980. Then it epitomised socialist Yugoslavia's radical, confident future; now, this semi-disused concrete colossus epitomises myopic municipal neglect.

Student City, with its uneven, stray-dog-trotted walkways, has likewise seen better days; but for AFV, there's no place like home. The festival began as a showcase for Yugoslavia's burgeoning government-supported experimental-cinema scene which flourished from roughly 1965 to 1985 – fruits of the extensive, influential, competitive but collaborative cine-club network, of which AFC is now a hardy remnant. In 1992, amid Yugoslavia's civil wars, the festival was suspended. It returned in 2003, with a new international focus: in 2014 the competition included 46 shorts from 16 countries. USA (10), Serbia (7), UK (5) and Austria (5) collectively accounted for more than half the selection – nothing from China, India, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Africa or South-East Asia. Geographical bias? Perhaps not. The programmers rely almost exclusively on submissions; their choices reflect the hot-spots of avant-garde cinema's support/funding networks across the globe.

Instead of awarding prizes, AFV's juries select up to ten 'Important Cinematic Works of the Festival'; the directors of these are offered a month-long AFC residency. Accommodation is included, transport is not. Even so, the chance to spend time in this likeably rough-edged metropolis, one of Europe's most spectacular and stimulating, is surely preferable to any gilded gewgaws. The jury-chosen films are also shown as a curtain-raiser at the start of the next edition, which meant that 2014's attendees were



Ljubomir Šimunić's *Gerdy, the Wicked Witch*

able to enjoy Mike Hoolboom's seductively casual rumination on mortality and friendship, *Buffalo Death Mask* (2013) – the third consecutive Canadian 'winner' after Allan Brown's duo *Kinetosis* (2011) and *Square Dance Hypnotist* (2012).

Brown's *Seventh Submarine* bafflingly failed to make the jury's six-strong selection this time, however. A hypnotic, flickering

Originally a showcase for Yugoslavia's experimental-cinema scene, the festival has developed an international focus

reconfiguration of footage taken from a 1970s coal-town documentary accompanied by oddball audio-extracts from a children's quiz-show ("What reptile is a natural submarine, and can you explain why?"), it spins an intense, allusive web via repetition and juxtaposition. These tools were also productively deployed by Brown's countryman Stephen Brooker in *Pepper's Ghost* (2013), an enticingly unlikely combination of sound (Buddhist chanting recorded in 1972) and image. In what is literally a documentary of the 18-minute film's shoot, a small tripod-mounted camera is trained on a mirror with panes of glass in between, gazing implacably down its own Z-axis. Brooker and colleagues appear, adding coloured gels to the glass and manipulating curtains to adjust the light-levels. Eschewing the obscurantism and self-seriousness that can often mar experimental works, *Pepper's Ghost* emphasises such collaborative filmmaking's joyful aspects.

The same sense of tossed-off virtuosity also distinguishes the Slovenian veteran Davorin Marc, who had one film in last year's list of "important cinematic works" – the hilariously abrupt *Ellen* (108 seconds) – and one in this year's competition, the cosmically abstract *Movie for Two*. His energising, jagged 21-minute post-punk provocation from 1984, *Fear in the City (1181 Days Later or Smell of Rats)*, or *Paura in citta (1181 dni pozneje ali vonj po podganah)*, was screened via a new Slovenian Cinematheque 8mm-to-35mm restoration. This was the only work I saw on celluloid during the five-day festival. The theme of this year's archival sidebar was artists' engagement with video; but one regrettable consequence of shoestring budgets is that the screenings were almost exclusively from digital. That is a shame. While it is firmly marginalised in mainstream cinema, 16mm film remains a viable and popular choice for avant-garde practitioners: that almost everything here, new or old, was shown digitally was AFV 2014's sole serious flaw.

But in any format Ljubomir Šimunić's *Gerdy, the Wicked Witch* (*Zlocesta Vještica*, 1976) can only bedazzle. A double-exposure eschatological masterwork, painstakingly shot on 8mm, the 14-minute *Gerdy* was edited in-camera over several years using film kept on ice to prevent deterioration. It makes copious, stupendous use of material taken direct from Yugoslavian TV screens – at a time when, as elsewhere in Europe, American imports were inescapable. A blissful, bludgeoning blizzard of looped images – the eye repeatedly caught by a frenetic Tina Turner/Ann-Margret duet – is accompanied and transfigured by two psychedelic/apocalyptic tracks taken (consecutively) from the album *666* by the Greek psychedelic group Aphrodite's Child.

A shadowy figure even in the context of Yugoslavia's avant-garde, Šimunić shunned state-funded Cine-Clubs in favour of private screenings, and has long since segued from filmmaking to (erotica-inspired) photography. On the evidence of *Gerdy*, however, his name deserves inclusion alongside the most internationally revered exponents of transgressive, uncompromised moving images – that underground tradition for which Alternative Film/Video so resolutely continues to fly the tattered, indestructible flag.

DARK PASTORAL

In Josephine Decker's much-fêted films, it's hard to tell whether the oneiric sounds and images heighten the action or generate it

By Adam Nayman

In Josephine Decker's 2012 short film *Me the Terrible*, a stalwart young female sailor sets a course for Manhattan. Once ashore, however, she finds herself suffocated and alienated by life in the big city, and her beloved white teddy bear is abducted, to boot. A lo-fi fantasy incorporating handmade props and hand-drawn animation, *Me the Terrible* deliberately skirts cuteness but its evocation of a dangerous urban space which, once discovered, must quickly be escaped is suggestive and sinister. It anticipates the desperate pastoral retreats of Decker's subsequent features *Butter on the Latch* (2013) and *Thou Wast Mild and Lovely* (2014). But while the woods in both of these movies are lovely, dark and deep, they're also terrifying – haunted spaces that possess anyone who ventures into their midst.

A performance artist and sometime actress (she was in fellow New Yorker Joe Swanberg's *Uncle Kent* and Onur Tukel's *Richard's Wedding*), Decker is a filmmaker of considerable skill and imagination. The technique on display in *Butter on the Latch* and *Thou Wast Mild and Lovely* – which both had their European premieres in 2014 at the Berlinale en route to numerous other festivals and a US theatrical release later in the year – is virtuosic in a way that at once brazenly calls attention to itself and serves precisely the needs of the stories being told. That old saw about form and function comes to mind in Decker's cinema, because it's genuinely hard to tell whether the oneiric images and sound effects are heightening the action or generating it. It's as if the movies themselves were dreaming.

"I've always been deeply influenced by my own dreams," says Decker, who is currently participating in an omnibus filmmaking project in which five New York City filmmakers will adapt each others' recalled subconscious fantasies. "It was very interesting for me to read Walter Murch's book *In the Blink of an Eye*, where he basically correlates the mechanics of film editing to dreaming; he says that we dream in edits, where we're in one place and suddenly we're in another, and we're able to follow that story."

Decker was the sole editor on *Butter on the Latch* and, working in tandem with her regular DP Ashley Connor, she creates a weave of woozy camera movements and abrupt cuts that at once trouble and open up the viewer's perception. As in *Me the Terrible*, New York is presented at the beginning of the film as an oppressive urban environment, although no longer from a child-like perspective; when Sarah (Sarah Small) snaps out of an alcohol-induced slumber on the cement floor of a dank garage crawling with unsavoury-looking characters, it's a rude awakening that also feels like a routine. By fleeing to a Californian Balkan music retreat to hang out with her friend Isolde (Isolde Chae-Lawrence), Sarah merely trades one threatening realm for another; the tension in the film is



Lovely, dark and deep – and terrifying: Decker's debut feature, 2013's *Butter on the Latch*

Decker creates a weave of woozy camera movements and abrupt cuts that at once trouble and open up the viewer's perception

between the peace-and-love, drum-circle vibe of the commune – a real place that welcomed the filmmakers for the duration of the shoot – and the intense loneliness and paranoia of the main character. The suggestion is that Sarah has brought her demons with her across the country, into a place so spacious and luxuriously dark that they might actually flourish.

If *Butter on the Latch* is a psychological portrait spiked with horror-movie flourishes – all shock cuts and weirdly incongruous inserts of smiling faces – then *Thou Wast Mild and Lovely* edges closer to pure genre territory. It's set in an isolated farmhouse in rural Kentucky and, as an opening sequence featuring a decapitated

chicken makes clear, there will be blood. An almost unrecognisably taciturn Joe Swanberg stars as Akin, a city boy who's come to do summer work on the ramshackle property owned by Jeremiah (Robert Longstreet) and his twenty-something daughter Sarah (Sophie Traub); her character's name is a callback to *Butter on the Latch* and, like the earlier film, this seems set largely within its leading character's sensual, slightly addled headspace, including a ramblingly poetic voiceover narration that, combined with the setting and (apparently incestuous) love-triangle plot, lightly evokes Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven*. *Thou Wast Mild and Lovely* doesn't approach that film's apocalyptic grandeur – when all hell breaks loose here, it's closer to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* – but Decker shares Malick's fascination with non-human subjects. Shots of cows and other creatures abound.

In interviews, the director has cited another inspiration for *Thou Wast Mild and Lovely*: the novels of John Steinbeck, who she says she prizes for his formalist qualities. "His stories are straightforward and character-driven, but he takes a lot of risks, too. He zooms out of the plots of his books and into these subjective spaces; suddenly, there's a whole chapter about the dust, or about men and women and tractors. It's very abstract, and a departure from the norm." The same can be said for Decker's own small but impressive body of work to date – although, given the rapturous reception her films have had so far, it seems she will soon be a known commodity. Here's hoping that, like the heroine of *Me the Terrible*, she'll continue exploring – and stay one step ahead of her passionate champions and potential imitators alike. S



Joe Swanberg in *Thou Wast Mild and Lovely* (2014)

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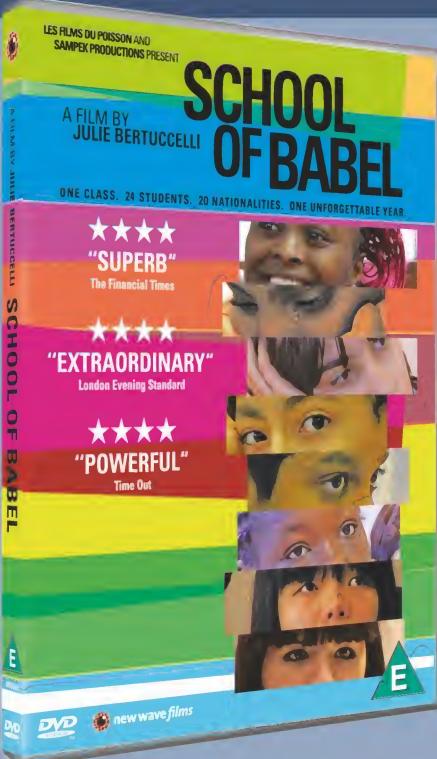
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School of Babel

Julie Bertuccelli

They are teenagers from all over the world and have just arrived in France. For a year they will be all together in the same "adaptation class" of a Parisian secondary school, to improve their French enough to integrate into the normal school system. 24 students, 20 nationalities... In this multicultural arena, we see the innocence, the enthusiasm and inner turmoil of these teenagers starting out on a new life, learning a new language and adapting to a different culture. Since opening earlier this year in France *School of Babel* has become a big critical and public success that has caught the imagination of educators and politicians alike. ● The DVD has 45 minutes of extras: interviews with Julie Bertuccelli and the teacher Brigitte Cervoni, plus a look at the pupils 2 years after the filming.

Available now on download from iTunes, Curzon Home Cinema, Google Play, Blinkbox and more.

Available 23 February on DVD

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Reviews



87 **Shaun the Sheep The Movie**

Shaun the smart-arse sheep is no Gromit (he has the enterprise but none of the long-taxed faithfulness) and his myopic and mumbling farmer is no Wallace. But for pure comic hijinks, the movie is superb: quick-fire and richly cartoonish



62 Films of the month



68 Films



94 Home Cinema



104 Books



Pushing action towards abstraction: Tang Wei and Chris Hemsworth as members of a Chinese-American anti-cybercrime investigation team

Blackhat

USA 2015

Director: Michael Mann
Certificate 15 132m 54s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Considering the radical newness of its subject's output in the final decades of his life, Mike Leigh's *Mr. Turner* is a disappointingly conventional 'late' film. But it conveys the bafflement and contempt with which the public greeted Turner's increasingly abstract canvases, as though they could only be the work of someone who was losing his sight, who had lost control of his gifts.

I have thought a great deal of the case of Turner during the roll-out of Michael Mann's *Blackhat*, dumped unceremoniously into US multiplexes with scant support from Universal Pictures, and a fresh occasion for some critics to wonder if the 71-year-old director hasn't lost his faculties. Nothing could be further from the truth, for *Blackhat* finds Mann continuing to work over familiar thematic concerns while pursuing the vein of stylistic experimentation to which he has dedicated himself for the past 15 years. The development of Mann's *caméra-style* is inextricable from his early embrace of digital tech, beginning with 2001's *Ali*. Mann's digital conversion preceded a gradual change in his approach, which would increasingly incorporate impressionistically smeared action, up-the-nose angles, handheld tumult and whatever is the

cinematic equivalent of 'loose brushwork' into his established practice of expanding and telescoping scenes, often counterintuitively. (Dead-air brooding is drawn out, while outbursts of physical violence are frenetic, inelegant.) The 'late Mann' style appeared fully formed in 2006's *Miami Vice*, was pushed still further in 2009's *Public Enemies* and has reached its apotheosis in *Blackhat*, a natural-born *film maudit* if ever I've seen one.

Rather than attempting to reproduce the look and feel of celluloid, Mann has always shot digital as digital, making the intrinsic qualities

of the new medium essential to the aesthetic of the movie. Mann's is a liminal, margin-walking cinema – whether this is a matter of pushing a narrative as far into the realm of abstraction as it will go while still attempting to keep it working as a satisfying genre piece, or shooting in extremely low light conditions so as to produce a fuzzy, 'noisy' image. Mann loves leaning on a picture until it starts to break into its constituent parts, as in the numerous instances where he pushes into a screenshot until the visual information turns into a pixels-per-inch



Michael Mann brings to US action movies a presentational aspect associated with Japanese cinema



pointillism. A line from *Miami Vice*—typically overblown, cocksure and quite cool—seems to encapsulate his approach to each new project: “Let’s take it to the limit one more time.”

Blackhat wastes no time in testing the viewer. It begins with what might best be described as a lengthy, wordless overture, tracking the progress of destructive electronic impulses through the guts of a computer system governing the coolant pumps of a nuclear power plant outside Hong Kong. This act of aggression from an unknown enemy leads to the formulation of a joint Chinese-US investigation team who, following the trail of money and patsies, travel from Los Angeles to China to Malaysia to Jakarta. The jetlagged storyline is full of glass-curtain skylines rendered in miniature as seen from the air, and computer components that loom like skyscrapers—at times it is difficult to know which you’re looking at. The film opens on an image of earth from space, covered in a fibrous web of network connections, and is fairly filled with gnarled nests of wiring, all suggesting a Gordian knot to be untangled. Mann has always been marvellous at showing how tech is woven into the very fabric of his worlds, including the state-of-the-art crimestopping inventions of the 1930s (*Public Enemies*) and 1980s (*Manhunter*). While Jean-Luc Godard had it that “living in modern society is virtually like living in a giant comic strip”, for Mann today it’s more like living in a giant hard drive.

Much of *Blackhat*’s action takes place in the digital ether—and in the subjective headspace

Mann loves leaning on a picture until it starts breaking into its constituent parts. As a line from Miami Vice puts it: ‘Let’s take it to the limit one more time’

of its characters—but Mann keeps one foot on terra firma, grounded in the physical facts of the world. As the usual suspects line up to castigate the far-fetched plot, a recent piece in *Wired* magazine—whose senior editor Kevin Poulsen acted as an adviser on the film—lauds *Blackhat*’s accuracy, asking if it’s “the best hacker movie ever made”. (The competition, admittedly, isn’t very stiff.) What separates Mann from the pack isn’t just the way he casually integrates reams of research into his films, however. D.W. Griffith, who died in 1948, only slightly older than Mann is today, towards the end of his life expressed disappointment at the medium whose vocabulary he had helped to create: “What the modern movie lacks is beauty,” he said, “the beauty of moving wind in the trees.” What Griffith was referring to is the disappearance of a certain sensitivity to the world, a sensitivity with which Mann’s films have always abounded. Think of the moment in *Thief* (1981), Mann’s first theatrical feature, when James Caan pauses on his mission of vengeance to stop at his newly purchased house—that will-never-be-a-home and takes a moment to contemplate—what else?—the wind in the trees.

Blackhat is full of such grace notes, moments of quiet intimacy. There is super-hacker Nicholas Hathaway (Chris Hemsworth), just sprung from prison to join the international anti-hacking task force, crossing an airport tarmac to pause and stare into the middle distance, seeing something known only to him, until Lien (Tang Wei)—an investigator who will become his lover—silently places a hand on his arm, drawing him out of himself. As much as the film is about the unseen tissue of digital connections, it is also about ineffable emotional ones.

Mann’s matter-of-fact, take-it-or-leave-it approach allows him to put over things that, in most hands, would seem flatly ridiculous. You can either accept that Hemsworth, best

known as a resident of Asgard, is a strapping, Foucault-reading computer genius, or you can walk. You can buy a scene where Viola Davis’s Agent Barrett drops an offhand reference to her husband’s death on September 11, or you can take it as a crude and last-minute attempt to add unearned gravitas to a scene. I took both as offered, without so much as blinking.

None of this goes down without the cast—particularly Davis, whose right-through-you deadpan gives disproportionate weight to a supporting role. She’s particularly imperious in a scene in which she treats a stock-exchange big shot to an efficient verbal gelding. Credit is also due to Leehom Wang and Tang Wei as a brother-sister team, she doing a reprise of the cards-on-the-diner-table scene from *Thief* with Hemsworth in a restaurant in LA’s Koreatown. This isn’t Mann’s only piece of self-citation, as he and screenwriter Morgan Davis Foehl give Hemsworth dialogue lifted from Mann’s 1979 TV movie *The Jericho Mile* (“I do my own time, I mess with no one, no one messes with me”) and 1986’s *Manhunter* (“That’s what you’re doing, isn’t it, you son of a bitch?”), and even a variation on the “Stay alive!” parting from 1992’s *Last of the Mohicans*. While Mann’s films’ visuals are atomised by increasing centrifugal force, at the centre remain the same themes and snippets of text placed in new combinations, like in an *ikebana* arrangement.

As this comparison suggests, Mann’s legacy is that of having added to the American action film a presentational aspect more associated with Japanese cinema. There is, however, no such thing as purely decorative arm candy in his work, for sexual and romantic longing is what drives his action plots, here quite literally: in order to keep their affair alive, Lien and Hathaway have to keep in pursuit of their target, and there is a throwaway scene of the two working in shoulder-to-shoulder tandem which I found quite moving. One hears a great deal of demand for diverse casts from Hollywood, and *Blackhat* has one, but whenever it’s done in a genre movie it tends to be cynically written off as a bad-faith bid for international box office. Now it may be that only Asian markets can save *Blackhat* from being a devastating loss—if they don’t, we may be looking at Mann’s last feature made on a blockbuster scale. If so, the failure will belong to film culture, not to him. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Thomas Tull
Michael Mann
Jon Jashni

Written by

Morgan Davis Foehl
Director of Photography
Stuart Dryburgh

Film Editors

Joe Walker
Stephen Rivkin
Jeremiah O’Driscoll

Production Designer

Guy Hendrix Dyas

Music

Harry Gregson-Williams

Atticus Ross

Leo Ross

Production Sound Mixer

Lee Orloff

Costume Designer

Colleen Atwood

Stunt Co-ordinator

Doug Coleman

©Legendary Production Companies
Legendary Pictures and Universal Pictures present a Legendary Pictures/Forward Pass production

A Michael Mann film
Executive Producers
Eric McLeod
Alex Garcia

Cast

Chris Hemsworth

Nick Hathaway

Tang Wei

Chen Lien

Viola Davis

Carol Barrett

Ritchie Coster

Elias Kassar

Holt McCallany

Mark Jessup

John Ortiz

Henry Pollack

Yorick Van

Wageningen Sadak
Leehom Wang
Chen Dawai

Dolby Digital/
Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
Prints by
Fotokem
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International
UK & Eire

Chai Wan, Hong Kong, present day. An attack launched by a hacker causes a near-meltdown at a nuclear plant. Shortly afterwards, the Mercantile Trade Exchange in the US is manipulated by an outside force. This prompts the creation of a joint Chinese-American investigation team, with Chen Dawai and his sister Lien liaising with FBI agents led by Carol Barrett. Chen recognises the code used by the hackers as one he wrote with his college roommate, Nick Hathaway, who is currently in jail. Chen brokers Hathaway’s release in exchange for his cooperation on the investigation, and the team follow the trail to Los Angeles, where a romance between Hathaway and Lien begins. In Hong Kong they investigate three locals who profited from the stock-market hack, and this leads them to Lebanese soldier of fortune Kassar. They attempt to apprehend Kassar but he escapes after a firefight. The team learn that Kassar’s boss, the hacker, is based in Jakarta. Barrett and Chen are killed by Kassar in a surprise attack. Hathaway and Lien travel to Jakarta to stop the mastermind. Identifying him, Hathaway drains his bank accounts; he forces him into a meeting and kills him. He and Lien begin a new life together, financed by the hacker’s funds.

Dreamcatcher

United Kingdom/USA/The Netherlands 2014
Director: Kim Longinotto

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

In the US, Kim Longinotto is celebrated as one of our most important contemporary documentarians. Her 2008 film *Rough Aunties*, about the Bobbi's Bear anti-child-abuse organisation in South Africa, won the World Cinema Jury Prize at Sundance, and 2013's *Salma*, an intimate portrait of the Tamil poet and politician battling patriarchy, was rapturously received.

Dreamcatcher, about an organisation that enables women to leave sex work, is the fourth of Longinotto's films to be selected for the World Documentary section at Sundance. Achingly moving and incredibly timely, it's likely to garner coverage and plaudits – and hopefully will also inspire change. It's shot on the streets of Chicago, where Brenda Myers-Powell and Stephanie Daniels-Wilson, co-founders of the Dreamcatcher Foundation, offer support to sex workers, equipped only with an SUV, condoms, cell phones and their own experiences of sex work.

Longinotto has a uniquely internationalist outlook and commitment to politically radical stories based on outsider subjects, captured in a film language whose unobtrusive precision conveys her warmth and respect for her subjects. Yet the filmmaker that Mark Cousins calls "the greatest documentary classicist working in Britain today" is, despite Second Run's best efforts, a prophet without due honour in her homeland. Neither *Rough Aunties* nor *Salma* received a theatrical release in the UK, and both the BBC and ITV passed on the chance to fund *Dreamcatcher*. It was turned down by the BBC, Longinotto told *Variety*, on the grounds that the corporation didn't want to fund "another film about prostitutes". Given recent news in the UK – particularly the stories of grooming and child sexual abuse in Rotherham, Rochdale and Bristol – *Dreamcatcher* is exactly what the BBC needs. In the end the film was supported by non-profit foundations and women's documentary producers Chicken & Egg.

As an editorial judiciously pointed out in last November's *Sight & Sound*, mainstream media still loves a 'happy hooker' but has no interest in the socioeconomic truth or individual impact of sex work. *Dreamcatcher* shatters any illusions: again and again, Longinotto bears witness to women describing sexual assaults



'We're here for you': activist Brenda Myers-Powell (right) has a gift for making relationships

that occurred during childhood and adolescence, often accompanied by strategies (both gifts and threats) to knot the survivor into a world of sex work. In an incendiary central scene in an after-school workshop at Paul Robeson High, student after student testifies to incidents of assault and abuse, accompanied by adult disbelief and an economic and judicial system that offers few options. As Dianah, a convicted sex worker only slightly older than the students, puts it, "I was molested to the point that I thought it was OK."

The film confidently walks an ethical line,

never re-assaulting its subjects. In an interview, Longinotto described working with the students, telling them: "We're doing [this] together; I'm relying on you. I'm not going to interview any of you. This is your film, so you do whatever you want." Months of building trust crystallise in the clarity and confidence of framing, achieving an intimacy that is never invasive – something that's especially apparent in the long interview with Myers-Powell's former pimp, Homer, now a speaker for her organisation. Crucially, we see both Homer and Myers-Powell in their home environments as well as at conferences and at the school workshop, and driving from one to the other, hip-hop on the car stereo, making the hope of social mobility explicit for the young students who seem trapped in an abusive cycle.

Even as extraordinary stories are told, Longinotto is attentive to ordinariness, repeated visual emblems that inscribe a history of economic deprivation: the scatter of fast-food wrappers and cups in a classroom; the dilapidation of blocks of brownstone warehouses. Nothing is extraneous or wallpaper: every detail relates to the central argument. From street to cell, this is a precise, thoroughgoing indictment of the systemic sexism, racism and classism that creates a climate of endemic sex work, and it combines this with bold and revelatory strategies for making change.

What's more, it's not about change being



Solidarity as a form of revolution: Myers-Powell (right), co-founder of the Dreamcatcher Foundation



This is a classic Kim Longinotto tribute to unorthodox grassroots activists, showing women changing their community from within

delivered top-down but rather – like *Rough Aunties*, *The Day I Will Never Forget* (2002) and *Pink Saris* (2010) – a classic Longinotto tribute to unorthodox grassroots activists, women changing their community from within. Sisters, to quote Cousins on *Sisters in Law* (2006), doing it for themselves. Myers-Powell and Daniels-Wilson's 'dreamcatcher' is a network of collaboration that releases women from the bonds of sex work and offers them a new, sustaining community.

This act of solidarity is, as Myers-Powell notes in a characteristically pithy observation, revolutionary in itself. "It's hard to have a sister... That's Rule Number 8 in the pimp's handbook: never let a ho trust a ho." Such fraught but tensile activist relationships, forged on the ground, often across barriers of race and class, are the unique hallmark of Longinotto's films, and Myers-Powell's gift for making connections is *Dreamcatcher*'s narrative motor.

The film opens with Myers-Powell and Daniels-Wilson in action, offering counselling

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Lisa Stevens
Teddy Leifer
Film Editor
Ollie Huddleston
Composer
Stuart Earl
Sound Recordist
Nina Rice

©Rise Films
(Dreamcatchers)
Limited
Production Companies
Rise Films, Green

Acres Films & Vixen

Films present in association with Impact Partners, Artemis Rising Foundation, Chicken & Egg Pictures and VPRO Developed with the support of Independent Television Service (ITVS) with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting

(CPB)

Executive Producers
Dan Cogan
Geralyn White
Dreyfous
Regina K. Scully

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Dogwoof

A documentary about the Chicago-based Dreamcatcher Foundation, a grassroots project that enables women to exit sex work on their own terms. The film begins as Brenda Myers-Powell and Stephanie Daniels-Wilson – Dreamcatcher's co-founders and themselves former sex workers – drive through the South Side of Chicago, stopping to talk to women on the street.

Whether handing out condoms, running high-school workshops for at-risk girls or attending bail hearings, Myers-Powell dedicates her life to facilitating the complex processes involved in leaving the street, and to combating the legacy of racism and poverty that narrows choices for the people of her community. Through her travels across the city, we observe the material consequences of this legacy and the resilience of those who struggle against it, inspired by Myers-Powell's own radical alteration to her life.

to women working on the streets. We see Myers-Powell, in freezing winter weather, supporting a sex worker called Marie, who is pregnant and being pimped by her boyfriend to support them, an unbearably complex knot to untie. Myers-Powell returns to see Marie on the street again and again, finally learning that she has entered Sex Workers Anonymous and has refused an invitation from her first child's father to co-manage a sex-work service. It's not the fairytale ending of *Pretty Woman*, but rather evidence of the real efficacy of the Dreamcatcher process.

Myers-Powell's own journey through the legal system provides the most illuminating evidence. She challenged a conviction for soliciting, which led to a state bill decriminalising prostitution; although it was not passed, the case has changed the situation for the women and girls with whom Dreamcatcher works. Myers-Powell is not only a symbol of legislative change, however, but also a whirlwind force for change herself, visiting prisons and leading workshops with at-risk groups in high schools, speaking at conferences with Homer, and picking up the phone late at night to distressed, pregnant teenagers. She lives and breathes her commitment and its painful relation to her own past. Early on, she relates the case history of a woman entering sex work after a long period of sexual abuse, only revealing at the end that it's her own story. *Dreamcatcher* is very much about Myers-Powell's control of her own life, image, project and being. The counter-narrative of the 'happy hooker' is the tragic victim, and conventional narrative struggles to allow for the idea of a survivor who has agency without erasing the disempowerment of the circumstances that engender sex work.

It's far from being an alien notion to the film's subjects, however. "This time," a woman named Keena tells Myers-Powell during one of her prison visits, "I'm telling him anything I have to so he won't kill me." Keena's words resound throughout the film, as we witness rather than judge so many women making desperate choices in the vanishingly narrow spaces available in underclass urban America. It is this ability to choose that we hear Myers-Powell draw out in conversations with Marie, Dianah and others, leading them to see that if they can make choices within this narrow compass, they can choose to take Dreamcatcher's help to exit it.

Whether she is literally self-fashioning at home – choosing her wig and makeup – or negotiating a reconciliation between Dianah and her family in prison, what Myers-Powell demonstrates are the skills and strengths she herself learnt on the street. As well as having resilience and determination, she is a fantastic performer, making the high-school girls she works with laugh amid the narration of horrors, and finishing the film with a hip-swaying, full-voiced performance of her favourite song. Longinotto's documentaries often, subtly and brilliantly, create such a stage on which her subjects can be their best selves, for themselves.

"If you want somebody who's going to care for you unconditionally, T, we're here for you." The offer of unconditional witness and acceptance that Myers-Powell makes to Temeka, a 15-year-old already working on the street, is also the offer made by Longinotto, camera in hand, to her subjects. *Dreamcatcher* is a film that cares for both its subjects and its audience, unconditionally, an incredible and urgent reinvention of the documentary, and social, contract. **S**



Women's picture bitch goddess: as frustrated housewife Eve, Eva Green evokes both Joan Crawford and Bette Davis

White Bird in a Blizzard

USA/France 2014

Director: Gregg Araki
Certificate 15 91m 2s

Reviewed by Graham Fuller

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist
His acclaimed 2004 film *Mysterious Skin* aside, Gregg Araki is a writer-director who suffers from the 'earlier, funnier movies' syndrome, though his work is as thematically consistent as that of his indie contemporaries Hal Hartley and Todd Solondz, and more so than the films of perennial critics' darlings Todd Haynes and Richard Linklater. Following two comedies that represent Araki-lite – *Smiley Face* (2007) and *Kaboom* (2010) – *White Bird in a Blizzard* may have been dismissed when it opened in America last autumn partially because it lacks the ironically witty violence, kinetic energy and nihilistic sybaritism Araki brought to his signature 'Teen Apocalypse Trilogy' *Totally F***ed Up* (1993), *The Doom Generation* (1995) and *Nowhere* (1997), to which *Kaboom* was a riotous throwback.

It's seldom acknowledged that Araki has become a more psychologically astute director than his 1990s films anticipated. Dealing with cause as much as effect, *Mysterious Skin* and *White Bird* are guardedly optimistic case histories of fictional teenagers destabilised by the aberrant needs of adults – in the case of *White Bird's* Kat Connors (Shailene Woodley), her miserable,

sex-starved parents: unhinged mother Eve (Eva Green), who lusts after Kat's boyfriend Phil (Shiloh Fernandez) – and in Laura Kasischke's 1999 source novel sleeps with him – and outwardly wimpish father Brock (Christopher Meloni), whom Araki, diverging from the book, makes Phil's secret lover. As desperate as they are perverse, Brock and especially Eve are portrayed as sympathetic victims of social conditioning, unlike *Mysterious Skin's* predatory baseball coach.

A less classical critique of suburban malaise than Sofia Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides* (1999) or Haynes's Douglas Sirk homage *Far from Heaven* (2002), *White Bird* offers Kat's repression of despair as a metaphor for sublimating the trauma of separation. Kat associates sex – which enables a young person to make the necessary break from her or his parents – with Eve's unwitting abandonment of her. A close-up of Kat smiling at Phil (in direct address to the camera) as she assents to intercourse for the first time, reflecting, "And like that, in a blink, my virginity disappeared... just like my mother," is given more dramatic weight than Eve's vanishing or Kat's later deadpan voiceover revelation that Brock killed her.

That Kat had consciously feared abandonment is indicated in a flashback showing her child self tented in a billowing white sheet while playing with Eve, and alarmed when she loses sight of her. The whiteness associated with Kat's fear is echoed in her recurrent dream of wearing white as she searches for the missing Eve in a blizzard; the feminist reading the movie warrants

suggests that Eve was originally lost to herself when she stood unsmiling in her white wedding gown, having passively consigned herself to a boring, orgasm-less life with Brock. Her latent sexual desires are stoked more by the beauty and satiety of the daughter who reminds her of herself 20 years ago than by the lunkish Phil.

After Eve disappears, Brock sends Kat to a psychotherapist. The smug adventuress she's become – seducing the fortysomething detective investigating her mother's disappearance and detailing their carnal affair to impress her virginal friends Beth (Gabourey Sidibe) and Mickey (Mark Indelicato), who function as a Greek chorus – evaporates in therapy, which reveals that she is confused and defensive. The therapist's view that dreams don't always reveal truths comes across as a disingenuous means of prompting Kat to examine hers more thoroughly. When, in one of her recurrent blizzard nightmares, the ghostly Eve calls to Kat to rescue her from an icy grave, it's awkwardly overdetermined, reiterating Kat's bland comment that her corner of suburbia is "frozen in time" and prefiguring the shot of Eve's body (unseen by Kat) in the basement freezer.

White Bird discloses its secrets less through obvious dream symbolism than through the alienation inherent in the *mise en scène*, which is dominated by medium shots depicting characters uneasily regarding each other across the widest possible expanses within confined spaces as they occupy opposite edges of the frame. Eve ogles the nervous Phil over the Connors'



Gregg Araki has become a more psychologically astute director than his 1990s films suggested, offering case histories of teenagers destabilised by the aberrant needs of adults



Tell all: Kat (Shailene Woodley, right) with Beth (Gabourey Sidibe) and Mickey (Mark Indelicato)

swimming pool; Kat and Brock contemplate Eve's fate across the cluttered basement after Kat has opened the Pandora's box of the freezer. The ensuing chiaroscuro shot of Brock – his face half-light, half-dark – captures his divided soul.

Kat's journey is structured as a psychoanalytic quest for reconciliation with the irrecoverable Eve (unlike *Gone Girl*, *White Bird* holds out no hope that its missing woman will return). Foreshadowed by shots in which the preadolescent Kat discovers, by prowling around the house, that her mother was unable to orgasm and her father used pornography, the undergraduate Kat's initially casual search for Eve embodies a need to atone for rejecting her during the period when she was sexually engrossed with Phil. Kat rationalises her tentative seduction of Detective Scieziesciez (Thomas Jane) as a response to Phil's loss of desire for her, though as a gruff, knowing, macho man, this 'other' is the polar opposite of her apparently milquetoast father and dumb Phil, secret bisexuals. Her choice of such a dangerous lover can be construed as a potentially numbing reaction to her mother's disappearance, an act akin to the grieving heroines resorting to promiscuity in Carine Adler's *Under the Skin* (1997), and *Wild* (2014).

More subversive than the seduction itself, which evokes a lamb entering a wolf's cave, is Kat's objectification of Scieziesciez in terms of his "cock and balls... hairy chest... primal smell" when she describes him to Beth the day after they first have sex. Straight male viewers in the audience are more likely than women or gay men to flinch at this candid appraisal of a piece of rough by a 17-year-old girl, but Araki confounds the expectation that Kat will be harmed by Scieziesciez when he shows their post-coital tenderness. Kat's initiation of a sexual relationship contrasts positively with her mother's submission in the 1960s (Eve is 42 in 1988, when *White Bird*'s story begins) to soul-destroying marital bondage.

Long in denial that she has been affected by her sudden motherlessness, Kat is redeemed – restored to feeling – when, during the basement confrontation, she finally cries after Brock falsely claims that he doesn't know where Eve is. Although the watchful viewer will glean that Phil was instrumental in Eve's disappearance, Kat is protected – by the discreet placement of the last flashback – from the nightmare of learning that he went to bed with her father. (Fascinated by mother-daughter dynamics, Kasischke skilfully exploited the simpler Freudian schema, in

which Kat's only sexual rival is her mother.)

Finally, returning to university after her rapprochement with Brock, Kat is left alone to grieve for Eve, whose vanishing is more germane to her evolution than the fact of her murder. This quietly hopeful conclusion demands a sleight in the film's chronology, since Kat's flight is interrupted by a glimpse of Brock's future arrest.

Woodley's portrayal of Kat, which includes nudity, disturbs the sincere, wholesome image she established in *The Spectacular Now* (2013) and *The Fault in Our Stars* (2014); Kat is closer to her initially ill-behaved daughter in 2011's *The Descendants*. Her seemingly effortless flow of condescension, smirkiness, naivety and slowly dawning compassion makes Kat a convincingly complex late adolescent. Except in flashbacks that show the lovely younger Eve beguiled by motherhood, Green pleasingly showboats as a 'women's picture bitch goddess', replete with Joan Crawford-like outrage and Bette Davis-style hectoring; Crawford's hysterical erotomaniac in Curtis Bernhardt's 1947 *Possessed* is analogous, though the sneering laugh with which Eve conclusively emasculates Brock might have challenged Crawford, even if she'd been directed by Sirk in his 1950s pomp. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Pascal Caucheteux
Sebastien K.
Lemerrier

Alix Madigan-Yorkin
Paulina Hatoupis

Gregg Araki

Written for the

Screen by

Gregg Araki
Based on the novel
by Laura Kasischke

Director of

Photography

Sandra Valde-

Hansen

Production

Designer

Todd Fjelsted

Music

Composed by

Robin Guthrie

Harold Budd

Production

Sound Mixer

Matthew Sanchez

Costume Designer

Mairi Chisolm

©White Bird

Productions, LLC

Production

Companies

Why Not Productions
& Desperate

Pictures present

in co-production

with Wild Bunch,

Orange Studio a

film by Gregg Araki

Executive Producer

Julie Peyr

Cast

Shailene Woodley

Kat Connors

Eva Green

Eve Connors

Christopher Meloni

Brock Connors

Shiloh Fernandez

Phil
Gabourey Sidibe

Beth
Thomas Jane

Detective
Scieziesciez

Dale Dickey

Mrs Hillman

Mark Indelicato

Mickey

Shery Lee

May

Angela Bassett

Dr Thaler

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Altitude Film
Distribution

US, 1988. Seventeen-year-old Kat Connors lives with her parents Eve and Brock in suburban Ohio. She loses her virginity to schoolmate Phil, who lives next door with his blind mother. Years as a bored, sexually frustrated homemaker who despises her dullard husband have brought Eve to the brink of madness. After a spell of bizarre behaviour, she disappears. Kat and Brock report her absence to Detective Scieziesciez. Kat tells her psychotherapist Dr Thaler that she doesn't miss Eve. Neglected by Phil, she seduces the fortyish Scieziesciez and boasts about his virility to her friends Beth and Mickey.

Three years later, Kat is a Berkeley undergraduate. She dumps her straitlaced boyfriend Oliver and returns home for spring break. Brock introduces her to his girlfriend May. Phil spurns her. Kat renews her affair with Scieziesciez but walks out on him when he tells her that he thinks Brock killed Eve after catching her with her lover. Phil denies he slept with Eve but tells Kat that Brock knows where she is. Brock finds Kat, Beth and Mickey trying to open his basement freezer and tells Beth and Mickey to leave. Fearing the worst, Kat opens the freezer that night, but it contains only food. Kat parts tearfully from Brock at the airport the next day.

She describes how Brock subsequently confessed to Eve's murder and hanged himself in prison. He strangled Eve after she found him in bed with Phil, burying the body in the hills before Kat could find it.

Amour fou

Austria/Luxembourg/Germany/France 2014

Director: Jessica Hausner
Certificate 12A 95m 43s

See Feature
on page 30

Reviewed by Michael Pattison

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Jessica Hausner's fourth feature, her first in five years, is nothing if not meticulous. Above all, *Amour fou* is one of the more refreshingly colourful period productions of the past year, unfolding as a succession of arresting compositions, lit with exquisite care by Hausner's regular cinematographer Martin Gschlacht. Recalling the vibrant pigments of Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer – a similarly unprolific and equally methodical image-maker – Hausner imbues her account of the 1811 suicide pact between the 34-year-old German writer Heinrich von Kleist (Christian Friedel) and his 31-year-old friend Henriette Vogel (Birte Schnöink) with an unusually bright palette. Complemented by Katharina Wöppermann's detailed production design, the visuals seem at once to be speaking on behalf of our emotionally repressed characters and rebelling against what could be mistaken for a rather cheerless plot.

Except for several rogue pans, Hausner opts for what we might at this point call Austrian austerity: sound design is typically and strictly diegetic, while the mostly fixed framing draws attention to the careful arrangement of actors within a shot. Which is not to say that *Amour fou* is static. Indeed, wryly upending the foregone conclusion of its real-events premise, this is a film full of incident, set against a backdrop of momentous shifts that span the economic (the implementation of a universal tax system across Prussia), the political (the international consequences of the French Revolution), the social (the death agony of feudalism), the scientific (dramatic disagreements in medical opinion) and the cultural (the artistic and philosophical tenets of Romanticism).

Anchoring and further expressing these interrelated threads is the individual: in Henriette, Hausner finds an unknowingly smart woman quietly but irrevocably impressed by one man's impossible suggestion that she'd be better off dead. If this is somehow meant to liberate her, perhaps from what Heinrich sees as the domestic tyrannies of their age, Hausner does well to question it. Indeed, such tyrannies are far from explicit: crucially, Heinrich's husband Friedrich (Stephan Grossmann) is depicted as an essentially honest man, a loving husband and an affectionate father. One of the deep ironies here is that it's as a result of his oblivious encouragement that Henriette continues to spend time with a man who, she knows, is capable of persuading her to suicide.

Indeed, the tragicomic absurdity of Hausner's tonally precise tale finds its easiest target in Heinrich, a "dear and sensitive man" who "seems to have a rather melancholic disposition". Emblematic of the Romantic, he is an equal source of intrigue, amusement and ambivalence. Taking the spontaneous, expressive impulses advocated by so many of his penniless peers to its logical extreme ("Would you care to die with me?"), he is repeatedly rejected by women to whom the suggestion of a joint suicide is understandably outrageous. The trouble is, Heinrich can barely take himself seriously, never mind what anyone else has to say about



Romantic agony: Birte Schnöink

him. When Henriette belatedly indulges him, having been diagnosed with an incurable abdominal tumour, he retreats with cold feet.

Were the Romantics a bunch of phoneys? It's hard to say – much less what Hausner might think about such matters. More likely, Heinrich's extreme version of the tortured artist is conditioned here less by a coherent philosophical principle than by the social ripples of history itself, which have no doubt compounded what to modern eyes looks like depression (Henriette's immovably rational mother dismisses one of his poems as "useless hypochondria"). In real life,

Kleist served in the Prussian army as a teenager, suffered many financial debts thereafter and was refused a loan both by his half-sister and by an aunt in the latter stages of his life – during which his literary output gained little recognition.

Perhaps the cleverest thing about *Amour fou* is how it presents itself as a film about a male protagonist when in fact the real complexity, the real narrative agency, lies with its leading woman. Henriette's half-liberating epiphany occurs when her husband, referring to the possibility that her condition might be neurological rather than biological, remarks: "They are connected, the spiritual and the physical." Hausner abandons her otherwise fixed framing for this exchange with a slow, revelatory zoom into her characters. It's a significant moment: Friedrich seeks a second opinion from an influential doctor in Paris, that breeding ground of more dynamic, more dialectical ways of thinking – such as, for instance, the notion that brain and body are linked.

The genuine tension that drives the latter stages of the film, whether one knows the real-life ending or not, stems from Henriette's newfound sense of action, of having the ability to write her own history. In this sense, she is the diametrical opposite of Heinrich's stiflingly Germanic cousin Marie (Sandra Hüller), who even when snubbing Heinrich's suicide suggestion remarks: "One has to accept one's fate, no matter how unappealing." Henriette's radical acquisition of something resembling self-consciousness makes the final scenes of *Amour fou* all the more tragic.

Assisted by some excellent acting by Schnöink and Friedel – as Henriette belatedly understands the ramifications of Heinrich's companionship and he coldly embraces his brutal cowardice in taking someone else down with him – Hausner underlines this final shift with a speculation of her own. On a wintry afternoon by the shores of Berlin's Little Wannsee, the only way this woman of burgeoning strength, courage and freedom could ever have gone along with one man's pathetic wish for her to kill herself was, in the end, to be shot in the back without her consent. S

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Martin Gschlacht
Antonin Svoboda
Bruno Wagner
Bady Minck
Alexander Dumreicher-
Ivanceanu
Philippe Bober
Screenplay
Jessica Hausner
Cinematographer
Martin Gschlacht
Editor
Karina Ressler
Production Designer
Katharina

Wöppermann
Sound
Uve Haussig
Costume Designer
Tanja Hausner

©coop 99
Filmproduktion/
AMOUR FOU
Luxembourg/
Essential
Filmproduktion/
WDR Arte/ARTE
France Cinéma
Production
Companies
A film by Jessica

Hausner
Produced with the
support of Film
Fund Luxembourg,
Österreichisches
Filminstitut, FISA
Filmstandort
Österreich,
Medienboard
Berlin-Brandenburg,
Filmfonds Wien, Land
Niederösterreich,
MEDIA
Produced in
co-operation
with ORF Film/
Fernsehabkommen,

WDR/ARTE, ARTE
France Cinéma, WDR
A coop 99
Filmproduktion
production in
co-production
with AMOUR FOU
Luxembourg
and Essential
Filmproduktion
with co-financing
from Parisienne
de Production
Coproduction Office
Executive Producers
Sarah Nagel
Isabell Wiegand

Cast
Birte Schnöink
Henriette Vogel
Christian Friedel
Heinrich von Kleist
Stephan Grossmann
Friedrich Louis Vogel
Sandra Hüller
Marie
Holger Handke
Arzt
Barbara Schnitzler
mother
Alissa Wilms
Dörte
Paraschiva Dragus
Pauline

Peter Jordan
Müller
Katharina Schüttler
Sophie
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles
Distributor
Arrow Film
Distributors Ltd

Berlin, 1809. Heinrich von Kleist, a young dramatist, attends dinner parties and piano recitals in search of a female companion with whom to commit suicide. Rejected by his cousin Marie, he meets Henriette Vogel, wife of a government official, and approaches her with the idea of a joint suicide. Shortly afterwards, Henriette is diagnosed with an incurable stomach tumour, and agrees to Heinrich's pact. Heinrich begins to express doubts but eventually they retreat

to the countryside to kill themselves. Encountering a mutual friend, however, they decide to postpone the suicide. Henriette hears of a doctor in Paris who may disagree with her diagnosis. Her husband encourages her to continue spending time with Heinrich. In November 1811, Henriette and Heinrich travel to a lake. Heinrich shoots Henriette and kills himself. Henriette's test results confirm that her condition was nervous rather than physical.

Appropriate Behaviour

United Kingdom/USA 2014
Director: Desiree Akhavan

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

It's not surprising to learn that Desiree Akhavan, writer, director and star of *Appropriate Behaviour*, has been invited to join the cast of *Girls*. In its rueful, funny, all-hang-out treatment of young female sexual mores in New York, Akhavan's film has a lot in common with Lena Dunham's *Tiny Furniture* (2010) and her hugely successful HBO series. What it adds is the cultural specific of the heroine's Iranian background, and the sexual specific of her bisexuality (though she seems to lean closer to lesbianism). In both aspects the film is openly autobiographical: Akhavan says that it was "inspired by my experience facing life after my first serious relationship with a woman".

In structure, the film moves simultaneously forwards and backwards: we see Akhavan's character Shirin trying to get her life – and especially her sex life – back into some kind of order after the acrimonious break-up with her girlfriend Maxine (Rebecca Henderson), while every so often flashing back to her memories of their one-year affair. The flashbacks – which are dropped in unheralded, and not in chronological order – at first make it seem as if the relationship was doomed from the start. Maxine is initially portrayed as hopelessly unimaginative; her idea of S&M role-play is to cast herself as a tax inspector who, instead of punishing Shirin, offers to help with her tax declaration. Gradually, though, we're shown a warmer, more positive side, for example when Akhavan cuts from Shirin having impersonal sex with a guy she's met on OkCupid to a loving, mutually enriching bed session with Maxine.

Interspersed with this are scenes of ethnic comedy, with Shirin attending raucous Iranian parties or evading pressure from her engulfing family to tell them about her boyfriends. (When she finally comes out, to her brother and her mother, far from causing the expected horror or distress, her confession is brushed



Yes she can: Desiree Akhavan

aside as being of no great significance.)

The humour is classic New York deadpan, often mined from embarrassment; in one of the choicest scenes, Shirin, along with her straight friend Crystal, marches into a lingerie shop and demands "the grown-up underwear for a woman in charge of her sexuality and not afraid of change". This bid for self-assertion is at once undermined by the saleswoman, who chides her for not wearing a bra. "Just because your breasts are small doesn't mean they're not legitimate."

Appropriate Behaviour ends on an indeterminate upbeat note; it seems that Shirin is finally over Maxine and ready to move on, though not as a result of any specific incident. Altogether the film's random structure and narrative looseness are central to its appeal and sense of truth to life; people and events pop up and disappear, often to no particular end (though there's a sweet performance from *30 Rock*'s Scott Adsit as Shirin's stoner boss, unfailingly upbeat). Akhavan may be offering nothing startlingly new in terms of subject matter, but her screen persona is appealing and her voice is unmistakably her own. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Cecilia Friguelle

Written by

Desiree Akhavan

Director of Photography

Christopher Teague

Edited by

Sara Shaw

Production Designer

Miren Marañón

Music

Josephine Wiggs

Sound Mixer

Kyle Porter

Costume Designer

Sarah Maiorino

Production Companies

Parkville Pictures

Made possible through the assistance of a grant from the Chris Columbus Film Production Fund

Support provided by IFP

Filmed with the support of the New York State Governor's

Office for Motion Picture & Television Development, NYC Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment

Executive Producers

Oliver Kaempfer

Hugo Kaempfer

Lucas Kaempfer

Katie Mustard

Cast

Scott Adsit

Ken

Desiree Akhavan

Shirin

Chris Baker

Ted

Justine Cotsonas

Layli

Anh Duong

Nasrin

Halley Feiffer

Crystal

Rebecca Henderson

Maxine

Hooman Majd

Mehrdad

Kelly McAndrew

Kate

Arian Moayed

All

Aimee Mullins

Sasha

Robin Rikoon

Marie

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Peccadillo

Pictures Ltd

Onscreen title

Appropriate

Behavior

Present-day New York. Iranian-American twenty-something Shirin has just broken up acrimoniously with her girlfriend Maxine. She moves out of their apartment. Her family, who don't know she's bisexual, help her find a new apartment in Brooklyn. Her straight friend Crystal urges her to come out to them but Shirin doesn't dare to. As she has quit her journalism job, Crystal's friend Ken offers her a post teaching a junior filmmaking class; it turns out that the 'juniors' are five-year-old boys. At an Iranian New Year's party, Shirin remembers how she met Maxine on the previous New Year's Eve.

Shirin contacts a man online who calls himself Brooklyn Boy; they have a one-night stand. At her lesbian discussion group, Shirin invites the group leader, Sasha, out for a drink. In a bar, Shirin is picked up by a couple, Ted and Marie, who take her back to their place for a threesome. Marie and Shirin enjoy it but Ted turns sulky and asks her to leave. Shirin goes to a party; Maxine is there with her new girlfriend. Shirin recognises the girlfriend as fellow teacher Tibet, who's in charge of the junior girls' filmmaking class. At the end of term the two groups present their films. The girls' film is sophisticated and minimalist, in black-and-white. The boys' film is called 'The Tale of the Lost Fart'. Ken says he loves it. At the next Iranian New Year's party, Shirin tentatively comes out to her brother and mother, but neither is shocked.

Bill

United Kingdom/United Arab Emirates 2014
Director: Richard Bracewell
Certificate PG 94m 2s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

With multiple roles taken by the talented troupe from CBBC's *Horrible Histories* shows (a spinoff from the long-running series of books by Terry Deary and Martin Brown), *Bill* sets about the Elizabethan era with a knockabout vulgarity in the spirit of Richard Lester's *Musketeers* films, *Blackadder* and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Every floor is covered with muddy straw, every passing churl is suitably filthy and chamber pots are flung about, while a troupe of Spanish assassins disguised as 'cockerne players' allow for two simultaneous caricature accent gags. The great schemers, doers and creators of history are usually played on film or television as awards-bait roles for thinly sliced hams but are here represented as base, childish and often grotesque – including Helen McCrory as a gargoyle-like Elizabeth I – but surprisingly credible.

As a Shakespearean biopic, *Bill* is no more fanciful than *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) or *Anonymous* (2011) – indeed, by drafting the future bard as a ghostwriter for an ambitious if obscure courtier (the Earl of Croydon, who is constantly being misidentified as the Earl of Crawley), it evokes various theories that the playwright's works were actually written by someone rich and titled. Eventually, Bill gets credit for his own work (which, as Christopher Marlowe points out, is a bit of a mishmash, since it's a scrambling together of elements from a selection of Shakespeare plays that suit the purpose of the foiled-royal-assassination plot).

There's room for the bones of an arc as ne'er do well Bill, winningly played by Matthew Baynton, is kicked out of lute band Mortal Coil after a runaway solo (naturally, they 'shuffle off' afterwards) and impulsively decides to become a writer, only to master his craft gradually, with input from a mortgage-ridden Marlowe. Bill finds his voice, as demonstrated by the gradual refinement of a masque originally entitled 'A Series of Funny Misunderstandings' (presented in a witty song) into something pithier and more lasting.

Contemporary parallels about terrorism – with a Catholic plot afoot, threat levels are raised to 'dark woad' – aren't forced, but serve to underscore the thesis that nothing really changes. There's a seam of real wit, especially in the embroidering of Shakespearean text and the use of selective quotations (including especially apt use of "Hell is empty and all the devils are here" from *The Tempest*), but this mostly manages



Tomato and not tomato: Mathew Baynton

to get laughs with pantomime-style bludgeoning as the in-disguise villain of the piece, played by co-writer Ben Willbond with a false moustache twirled over a real one, is constantly recognised by folks who gasp his full title "King Philip the Second of Spain!"

The film is casually brutal but not bloody (the treacherous earl idly wonders why his much abused servant hasn't shown up for his beheading, not noticing that he's landed a new job as the axe-sharpening executioner) and holds back on all but the mildest sexual innuendo (despite the crucial role of a cross-dressing spy who decides he'd rather be a drag actor than a hired killer), making it especially suitable for irreverent children. ☺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Charles Steel
Alasdair Flind
Tony Bracewell
Richard Bracewell

Screenplay

Laurence Rickard
Ben Willbond
Based on an idea by
Laurence Rickard,
Ben Willbond,

Richard Bracewell

Director of Photography

Laurie Rose

Editors

David Freeman

Billy Sneddon

Gary Dollner

Production Designer

Simon Scullion

Original Music

Andrew Hewitt

Sound Recordist

Rashad Omar

Costume Designer

Charlotte Morris

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The British Film Institute/British Broadcasting Corporation

Production Companies

BBC Films and BFI present in association Koch Media, Screen Yorkshire and Lipsync LLP a

Cowboy Films/Punk Cinema production

Bill Films Productions

Limited has been supported by Screen Yorkshire through the Yorkshire Content Fund

Produced in association with Kreo Films FZ LLC

Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund

Developed in association with BBC Films

Executive Producers

Christine Langan
Joe Oppenheimer

Ben Roberts
Natascha Wharton

Thomas Hedman
Stefan Kapelari

Craig McNicol
Hugo Heppell

Norman Merry
Peter Hampden

Phil Hunt
Compton Ross

Cast

Mathew Baynton

William Shakespeare,

'Bill' /Lord Burghley/

English messenger/

customs official

Simon Faraday

Earl of Croydon/

Juan Domingo/

sausage/Dimitri

Alexandrovitch/

fur seller

Martha Howe-Douglas

Anne Hathaway/
Molly/Spanish

courtier/body

collector

Jim Howick

Christopher Marlowe/

Gabriel Montoya/

cynical jester/

palace doorman/

mysterious man/

even grubbier thief/

party planner

Laurence Rickard

Sir Francis Walsingham/Lope Lopez/stand-up

jester/chatty

guard/slightly

late courier/lan/

hanging criminal/

chicken drumstick

Ben Willbond

King Philip II of Spain/Earl of Southampton/

grubby thief/

Alexander Dimitrievitch/

head of guards

Helen McCrory

Queen Elizabeth

Damian Lewis

Sir Richard Hawkins

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Koch Media

Cake

USA 2014

Director: Daniel Barnz

Certificate 15 101m 42s

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Daniel Barnz may only have four directing credits to his name but he has already shown his investment in female-led stories, with *Phoebe in Wonderland* (2008) and *Won't Back Down* (2012). His latest and best film to date is no different.

Cake's title refers to the wish of chronic-pain sufferer Nina (Anna Kendrick) who, asked during a support-group exercise what she would most like to do were she able, answers that she would bake a cake for her son. This scene is reported rather than seen, because Nina has taken her own life before the film's beginning. Instead, her words are conveyed through Claire (Jennifer Aniston), another sufferer of chronic pain and the film's main character, who is visited by Nina's haloed ghost, foul-mouthed as she wasn't in life – a clue that this post-mortem Nina, perfectly frosted as a shop-bought confection, is less revenant than mirror-manifestation of Claire's conscience. For Claire's modus operandi is irascibility: a sourness that's as much a symptom of her unrelenting pain as sleeplessness and prescription drug addiction, but one she savours as a source of amusement to relieve if not the pain then its monotony. Indulging this reflex, however, precipitates Claire's expulsion from the support group and her separation from her husband. Only Silvana, Claire's housekeeper (the brilliant Adriana Barraza), with the patience of a saint, remains to prevent any further damage to Claire's person.

Sewing plot into natural dialogue with invisible stitching to hide all trace of exposition seems to have been the priority of screenwriter Patrick Tobin (the visions of Nina are thus somewhat self-defeating). Claire's swatting away Silvana's recommendation that she use ointment to reduce scarring lets us know that her accident wasn't long ago. Similarly, an early incident with a box of toys is a sign that Claire was a parent and lost her child in the accident.

Aniston pushes her performance to the furthest reaches of her body, conveying discomfort in the smallest of details, as in the way she grips her seatbelt high up by the retractor. It's a performance of absolute



Jennifer Aniston, Sam Worthington

conviction and one that, in spite of the strain it communicates, looks effortless.

This is not, though, the first role of its kind for Aniston. The actress, an adept at the romcom genre, impressed differently in *The Good Girl* (2002), playing an ordinary store clerk disappointed with life and her doped-up, house-painter 'pig' of a husband. In that film as in this, Aniston was in every scene and was called on to register in close-up matters as dark as suicide and sex under duress. Thirteen years on, it's possible the critics have forgotten that Aniston has already undergone the touted 'deglamorisation' for a part, a term that has attached itself to *Cake* since its Toronto premiere. It should be noted that the concomitant charges of Oscar-baiting and the more pernicious insinuation that a performer's merit is built on the way that he or she looks are seldom if ever levelled at male artists. What's worse, such criticism suggests that a story about clinical depression and other invisible illnesses could not be of interest unless made more enticing by the piped icing of against-type performance.

Necessarily, *Cake* is not a light film, but it's not without hope either. Eschewing categorisation throughout, it is ultimately revealed to be not about suffering but suffering, and it belongs to that rarest of genres: stories of female friendship. ☺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Ben Barnz

Kristin Hahn

Courtney Solomon

Mark Canton

Written by

Patrick Tobin

Director of Photography

Rachel Morrison

Editors

Kristina Boden

Michelle Harrison

Production Designer

Joseph T. Garrity

Music

Christophe Beck

Sound Mixer

Steven Morrow

Costume Designer

Karyn Wagner

©Cake Productions, LLC

Production Companies

Cinelou Films

presents a Cinelou

Films, Echo Films and We're Not Brothers production

in association with Shenghua

Entertainment

A Daniel Barnz film

Executive Producers

Jennifer Aniston

Yu Wei-Chung

Patty Long

Shyam Madiraju

Film Extracts

Going Attractions

The Definitive Story

of the American Movie (2013)

Cast

Jennifer Aniston

Claire Bennett

Adriana Barraza

Silvana

Anna Kendrick

Nina Collins

Sam Worthington

Roy Collins

Mamie Gummer

Bonnie

Felicity Huffman

Annette

William H. Macy

Leonard

Chris Messina

Jason Bennett

Lucy Punch

Nurse Gayle

Evan O'Toole

Casey Collins

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)

Los Angeles, present day. Lawyer Claire suffers from chronic pain following a road accident. Recently separated from her husband, she is thrown out of her support group for making upfront comments about the suicide of fellow sufferer Nina. Nina's ghost, full of censure, appears to Claire, making Claire inquisitive about the life she left behind. Running out of the prescription painkillers to which she is addicted, Claire has her housemaid Silvana drive her to Mexico to restock. She blackmails the support group leader for Nina's address, and strikes up a non-sexual, mutually supportive relationship with Nina's depressed widower Roy. Silvana invites Roy and his infant son Casey for lunch, which is interrupted by the penitent appeals of the man responsible for the accident that injured Claire and killed her five-year-old son. Claire overdoses and is hospitalised. Discharged, she again attempts to kill herself on a railway track, but is prevented by Silvana, who denounces Claire's ingratitude and poor treatment of her. Claire visits her son's grave with Silvana and, overcoming her fear, manages for the first time since her accident to sit upright instead of lying prone in the passenger seat of her car.

Catch Me Daddy

United Kingdom 2013
Directors: Daniel Wolfe, Matthew Wolfe
Certificate 15 111m 35s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

In a climactic scene of wrenching conflict and impending violence, debut director Daniel Wolfe holds a shot that deliberately draws our attention to some red shoelaces. That little splash of crimson is somehow emblematic of Wolfe's feature, the sort of momentary artful diversion you'd never see in a Ken Loach film, where theme, content and social veracity hold sway. Wolfe, though, wants us to know that the pulsating red says something significant about the wearer, and it's only through this frisson of aesthetic heightening that the emotional truth gets across.

Ostensibly, this is a lovers-on-the-run thriller, peopled with characters so archetypal that the script, by the director and his brother Matthew, doesn't feel the need to do very much with them. Sameena Jabeen Ahmed and Connor McCarron are Laila (free-spirited, dreaming of better things) and Aaron (wary, sensible, nurturing), the fugitive couple whose cross-cultural romance has enraged her restaurateur father into sending two teams – a pair of white bruisers, a quartet of equally ruthless British Asians including Laila's understandably anxious brother – across Yorkshire to retrieve her by any means necessary. All very uncomplicated – but allowing viewers to feel comfortable with a readily familiar outline has the effect of freeing them to give themselves to the moment, since the essence of the film is a stream of intoxicating, heightened shots (such as the aforementioned shoelaces) shaping a striking cumulative potency. A spilt bottle of luminous turquoise nail polish glugs its contents onto a glass table, bodies whirl and spin to the hyperventilating strains of Patti Smith's 'Land' and skin tones glint in the darkness, while the return to a world of pitiless fluorescent lighting is almost blindingly unsettling.

Throughout, the collaboration between director Wolfe and DP Robbie Ryan achieves for these unlovely environs of post-industrial Yorkshire what photographer William Eggleston did for his own grungy corner of the American South, summoning forth a world of vibrant, madly



Runaway: Sameena Jabeen Ahmed

clashing colours where we least expect it, thus allowing us the thrill of seeing through new eyes.

Combine that with a slow build towards shocking carnage – and some extraordinary music cues, from early Tim Buckley to a terrifying closing dirge by Bahamian cult figure Exuma – and the overall experience is likely to send viewers home decidedly shaken. As such, this stands as a notable debut, though on reflection one not without its issues. A surfeit of rather sketchy villains and too much cross-country hither and thither lead to problems of overlength, and although the escalating mayhem leaves us in no doubt about the passions raised in this British-Asian community by notions of 'honour', the film doesn't have that much to contribute by way of understanding. Next time round, perhaps, Wolfe will bring more thematic fibre to his filmmaking – but it says a lot about his ability to cast an audiovisual spell that for all the caveats one might express about the content, the spell remains vividly unbroken while *Catch Me Daddy* is on screen. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Mike Elliott
Producer
Hayley Williams
Written by
Daniel Wolfe
Photography
Robbie Ryan
Film Editing
Dominic Leung
Tom Lindsay
Production Design
Sami Khan
Original Score
Matthew Wolfe
Daniel Thomas
Freeman
Production Sound Mixer
Stevie Haywood
Costume Design
Hannah Edwards

©Tiber Films
Limited/British Film Institute/Channel Four Television Corporation
Production Companies

Film4 and British Film Institute present in association with LipSync Productions LLP and Screen Yorkshire an Emu Films production
A film by Daniel & Matthew Wolfe
Executive Producers
Jim Mooney
Waliullah
Katherine Butler
Christopher Collins
Norman Merry
Peter Hampden
Hugo Heppell
Jenny Borgars
Danny Perkins

Cast
Sameena Jabeen Ahmed
Laila
Gary Lewis
Tony
Connor McCarron
Aaron
Nichola Burley

Vicky
Wasim Zakir
Tariq
Anwar Hussain
Junaid
Barry Nunney
Barry
Shobhy Kaman
Shobhy
Adnan 'Idy'
Zakir Hussain
Bilal
Ali Ahmad
Zaheer
Kate Dickie
Aaron's mum

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
StudioCanal Limited

Yorkshire, present day. Young lovers Laila and Aaron have eloped and are living in a caravan outside a small town, where he looks for work and she has a job at a hairdresser's. He is white; she is from a British-Asian family. Two groups of men are searching for them – racist white thug Barry and coke-addict Tony; and Laila's brother Zaheer with Bilal, Junaid and Shobhy. They are all working for Laila's father, restaurateur Tariq, who's determined to bring his daughter back. Information from Zaheer points to the couple's location. Aaron gives Barry and Tony the slip, but Zaheer confronts Laila in the caravan and is accidentally killed when he falls into a glass table. The lovers get away across the fields before heading back to town to seek an escape by taxi. Aaron becomes suspicious of the driver and forces the car off the road, but the pursuers soon catch up. Bilal, Junaid and Shobhy hatchet Aaron to death; Tony grabs Laila for himself. Needing to feed his habit, he cuts his own deal to deliver Laila to Tariq. Bilal, Junaid and Shobhy kill Barry.

Returned to her father, Laila begs that he remember his love for his little girl, but Tariq, realising that she was involved in Zaheer's death, places a makeshift noose around her neck. He faces a decision whether to kill her or let her live.

Coherence

USA/United Kingdom 2012
Director: James Ward Byrkit
Certificate: not submitted 88m

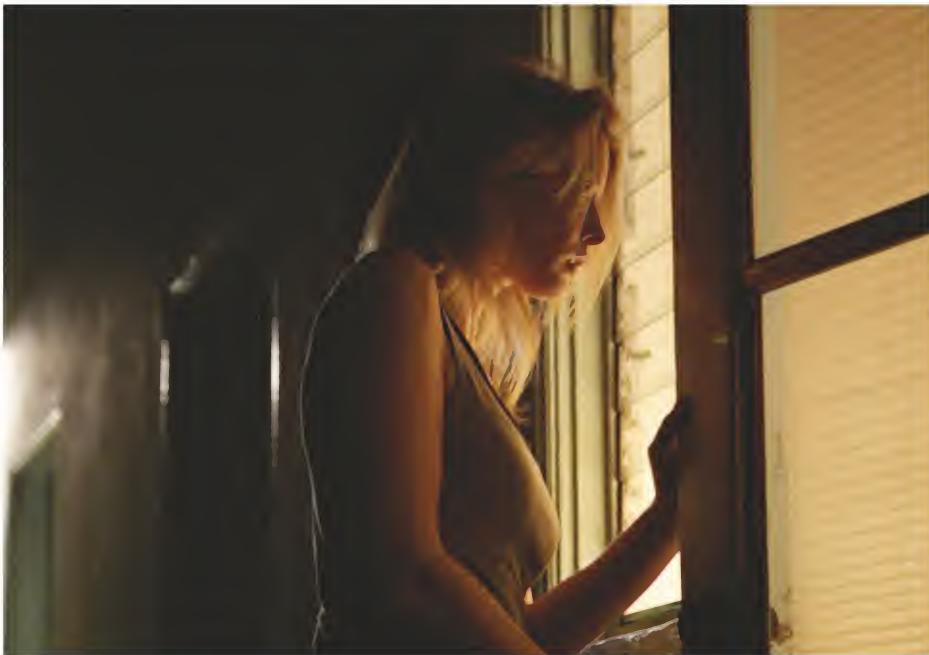
Reviewed by Calum Marsh
See interview on page 11

One cool evening, in the suburbs of Santa Monica, a small group of friends gather in the dining room of chic middle-class couple Mike (Nicholas Brendon) and Lee (Lorene Scafaria), to sip red wine and lightly banter. On this particular evening, a sharp-witted young woman named Emily (Emily Foxler) observes, something known as Miller's Comet is set to pass nearby, and the group may be interested to know that it could yield a number of unusual effects. Apparently, a similar comet flew over Finland in 1923: "After it passed," Emily offers, "people would get lost, they would wake up in the wrong homes, they would forget where they were." Nobody could account for the phenomena seemingly produced by the comet. And this one, disconcertingly, is expected to soar across California quite a bit closer to the ground.

The rest of the group, needless to say, aren't convinced, and it isn't long before they've good-naturedly mocked the subject into oblivion. Ah, but we know better: the strains of ominous music and the faint glow of menace in the air portend all manner of celestial havoc, and it seems clear enough that Emily's warnings ought to be heeded. It isn't until a sudden power outage and a pair of inexplicably cracked iPhone screens cause alarm in the sceptical Hugh (Hugo Armstrong) that the others begin to show a modicum of concern; Hugh's brother, a physicist, apparently cautioned him earlier that evening about the comet's powers, and the convictions of a man of science, combined with these minor occurrences, prove evidence enough for a certain unease to take hold. When Hugh and Amir (Alex Manugian) venture down the block to look in on the one nearby house that still has power, they swiftly return in fright, a rather distressing object in hand: a small steel box, found at the other house, containing photographs of the entire group – each with a number on its blank side, written, most disturbingly of all, in Emily's hand.

Things quickly become more complicated still, as notes written are found precisely duplicated, memories shared are rendered irreconcilable, and seemingly every expedition out of the door results in another cosmic wrinkle. I will spare you the details, assuming I could reiterate them coherently anyway, but we are inching perilously close here to the bewildering narrative curlicues of the once ubiquitous puzzle film, which among certain moviegoers will doubtless be cause for worry. You may recall that at some point in the early 2000s, in America especially, it became quite trendy for filmmakers to boast of their intelligence by turning their movies into little tricked-out Rubik's cubes of frequently labyrinthine complexity. Christopher Nolan's *Memento* is perhaps the most representative example: its neo-noir yarn of a man seeking revenge against the thugs who left his wife dead and his memory impaired unfurled backwards, leaving the audience to mentally rearrange the sequence of events as they proceeded on screen in reverse.

Now, *Memento* isn't a particularly insightful or penetrating film, and beyond a vague idea about the ways in which trauma can curdle into obsession, it doesn't have much of



Watching you watching me: Emily Foxler

anything to say. But the convolutedness of its narrative confers on the action a faint aura of serious thought. As *Coherence* begins winding itself into pretzels of competing timelines like an exercise in interdimensional hopscotch, one suspects that director James Ward Byrkit may be trumping up the proceedings with similar bluster. But it soon becomes apparent that *Coherence*'s complexity is of the more hard-earned variety – and that Byrkit is far less interested in the superficial demands of a puzzle than in the more enduring pleasures of dense science fiction. The intricacy of this film isn't merely window dressing; it is essential to its function.

In this, of course, the film recalls Shane Carruth's low-budget thriller *Primer* (2004), among the most meticulous time-travel pictures ever devised; *Coherence* is possessed of a similar rigour in its approach to story and form, and in both cases the appeal comes partly from our awe at how deftly the films have been put together. The difference perhaps is that into this already knotty material Byrkit has woven an even more intriguing layer. For all its elaborate

splendour, *Coherence* turns out to be, at heart, a romantic drama, and a fairly sophisticated one at that. Emily, who emerges as something like our hero, is introduced in what seem to be the final stages of a relationship with Kevin (Maury Sterling), whose job will shortly take him out of the country on a four-month expedition. The threat of her abandonment hangs in the air between them, and Kevin, either out of cruelty or ignorance, regards his partner with the carelessness of a man who wouldn't much mind if he were rendered newly single. It hardly helps matters that Laurie (Lauren Maher), an ex-girlfriend of Kevin's, has been invited to the dinner as Amir's date; soon she's flirting with him, and the sparks of supernatural phenomena that start to fly only seem to stoke her affections.

Byrkit is obviously an imposing intellect, and one can well imagine him plotting this script in charts and graphs across huge reams of paper. But he is also uncommonly attuned to the gradations of human feeling – the way that tenderness and intimacy can shift or dissipate after nothing so much as a word or a glance. Θ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Lene Bausager
Screenplay
James Ward Byrkit
Story
James Ward Byrkit
Alex Manugian
Director of Photography
Nic Sadler
Arlene Muller

Edited by
Lance Pereira
Music
Kristin Øhrn Dyrud
Onset Audio
Seth Cooper
Jason Millard

©Glowstick, LLC
Production Companies

Bellanova and Ugly Duckling Films present
Executive Producers
Alyssa Byrkit
James Ward Byrkit
Cast
Hugo Armstrong
Hugh

Nicholas Brendon
Mike
Emily Foxler
Em
Elizabeth Gracen
Beth
Lauren Maher
Laurie
Alex Manugian
Amir
Lorene Scafaria

Lee Maury Sterling
Kevin
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Distributor
Metrodome Distribution Ltd

Not submitted for theatrical classification
Video certificate: 15
Running time: 87m 47s

California, present day. A group of friends gather for a dinner party in the home of Mike and Lee. One of the group, Emily, says that a low-flying comet will soon pass over California; she warns that a previous such comet caused strange phenomena in Finland. There is a power outage, and the friends start to feel uneasy. Emily finds that a portal has been created in the street nearby, and

that by stepping through it she can return to the party in one of several million alternate dimensions or timelines. Deducing that after a few excursions it is almost impossible to find her way back, Emily concludes that she must walk repeatedly through the portal until she finds a party close enough to the original, so that she can remain there once the comet passes and the portal closes.

Dancing in Jaffa

USA/Germany/Israel/United Kingdom 2013

Director: Hilla Medalia
Certificate PG 89m 29s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

It could be overfamiliarity with narratives structured around competition, perhaps even a certain cynicism about stories using that format to suggest social change in action, but it's not hard, sight unseen, to second-guess what we can expect from a documentary like *Dancing in Jaffa*. Much as we might agree that a ballroom-dancing programme uniting schoolchildren from the Jewish and Palestinian Israeli communities in Jaffa can only be a good thing, the rest would seem fairly predictable: a kindly but exasperated instructor struggling against ingrained attitudes before hearts and minds are duly changed. Which, as it turns out, is exactly what we get. Yes, it's undeniably cheering to have some good news from this troubled region, but given that Hilla Medalia's film sticks so closely to well-worn formula, was there any real point in making it?

Actually, formula notwithstanding, the film makes a rather good case for itself, since it reminds us that on an individual level, real people are far more unexpected and intriguing than the narrative context in which they're delivered up to us. The build-up to the dance competition is a cliché all right, but it provides a sturdy trajectory that frees Medalia to spend time with children and parents on both sides of Israel's divide – serving an especially useful function in portraying the daily lot of Palestinian Israelis, a constituency too often overlooked in the ongoing conflict. Hence we meet Alaa, who lives with his family in a tumbledown shack. He's the son of a fisherman whose vessel is hardly much bigger than the average bathtub, yet still the young boy smiles through the deprivation. Not so sad-eyed Noor, who carries the pain of losing her father until the process of learning to dance affectingly suggests a new outlook on life gained through nascent self-confidence.

In the background, both Palestinian Israelis and rightwing religious Jews protest their respective claims on the land, though the Jewish participants featured in the film also defy the stereotypes: we meet a single mother who had twins via artificial insemination, and a teacher, Ms Rachel, who's lost family members to Palestinian terrorist attacks but still makes a passionate argument for mutual understanding at her school, which draws its intake from both communities.

Meanwhile, in the middle is Pierre Dulaine – already the subject of the documentary *Mad Hot Ballroom* (2005) and played by Antonio Banderas in its fictionalised screen version *Take the Lead* (2006). He has his own justifications for being there, since his Palestinian-Irish parents fled their Jaffa home during the civil war before the founding of Israel. Indeed, one of the film's most quietly telling scenes is when he blithely pitches up hoping for a peek at the old place, only to be warded off with a tacit threat of violence by the new Jewish 'owner'. He has spent decades perfecting his best fake smile on the dance floor, so his demeanour barely cracks, but there's just enough disappointment visible to hint more broadly at the bitter legacy faced by many Palestinian families in the same situation.

Generating appreciable comic momentum from its early scenes showing pre-pubescent boys hilariously reluctant to lay hands on their female

A Dark Reflection

United Kingdom 2014
Director: Tristan Loraine
Certificate 15 102m 17s

Reviewed by Tom Webb

Tristan Loraine's investigative thriller centres on the aviation industry that once employed him. A former pilot, Loraine lost his certificate to fly for the same reasons that make up the conspiracy at the heart of this fast-paced but ultimately disappointing British feature. On learning that her boyfriend Joe (T.J. Herbert) has been suspended from his job with JASP Airlines following an incident, plucky journalist Helen (Georgina Sutcliffe) convinces the editor of her small local paper to let her write an exposé. Her investigation reveals that faulty engines are pumping lethal gases into the plane's cockpits, and soon airline executive Ben Tyrell (Mark Dymond) is trying to stop the truth coming out.

The film claims to be Britain's biggest cooperatively funded feature film, raising its finance via contributions from airline crew, trade unions and the public. And though this is an honourable intention, it means that the skill of filmmaking takes second place to the desire to expose a subject very close to the hearts of those involved. Any notable acting talent is overlooked in favour of sweeping helicopter shots, foreign locations and huge country mansions occupied by the villains of the piece, the airline owners. This gives the film a stylish and contemporary look but means that it ultimately fails to connect on an emotional level. ☀



Open stance: Dancing in Jaffa

classmates (never mind the communities on the other side), *Dancing in Jaffa* in the end offers a beguiling lesson on the power of adeptly judged observational docs to generate a compassion and empathy that's bigger and broader than the narrow confines of a seemingly hackneyed story structure. As Dulaine's laudable exploits suggest, closed minds don't get any of us very far. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Diane Nabatoff
Neta Zwebner-Zaibert

Hilla Medalia

Written by

Philip Shane

Hilla Medalia

Director of Photography

Daniel Kedem

Edited by

Philip Shane

Bob Eisenhardt

Original Score

Krishna Levy

Issar Shulman

Sound

Haim Meir

©Dancing Jaffa

Production Companies

Tiara Blu Films and

In Colour

[1.78:1]

Part-subtitled

Distributor

Sirenic Films

Film Independent, Other Israel

In association with Ja-Tail Pictures, Warrior Poets, Shine Global, K5 International, Baby George Productions

Keshet Broadcasting Ltd, Gesher

Multicultural Film Fund with the support of the Israel Film Council

With the support of Righteous Persons Foundation, Kroll Fund for Jewish Documentary Film, IFP Market, The Good Pitch, Puma Creative Mobility Award in partnership with Britdoc Foundation,

Flight patterns: Marina Sirtis, Jo Bourne Taylor

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Tristan Loraine

Screenplay

Viv Young

Based on a story by

Tristan Loraine

Executive Producers

John Hoyte

Director of Photography

Nicholas Eriksson

Edited by

Tristan Loraine

Production Designer

Chloe Potter

Music

Moritz Schmittat

Head of Sound

Matthew Weeks

Wardrobe Director

Laura Stokes

©A Dark

Reflection Ltd Production Company

Fact Not Fiction Films present

Executive Producers

John Davison

Director of Photography

Adrian G. Pop

Edited by

Eben Bolter

Production Designer

Luis San Martin

Music

Granda

Cast

Georgina Sutcliffe

Music

Helen Eastman

Head of Sound

Rita Rammani

Wardrobe Director

Natalia Stevens

©A Dark

Nicholas Day Charles Jaspar

Paul Anthony-Barber

Nick Robertson

Stephen Tompkinson

Captain David Morris

TJ Herbert

Joe Forbes

Tomi May Greg Carter

Jo Bourne Taylor

Eve Tyrell

Leah Bracknell

Isabelle Morris

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor

DFT Enterprises

Down Dog

United Kingdom 2013
Director: Andres Dussan
Certificate 15 96m 57s



Misdiagnosis: Dylan Llewellyn, Jason Durr

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

The lesson taught to feckless father Frank in this clunky British comedy is a bargain version of the instructive ordeal in *The Game* (1997): lose everything, learn to care. However, the crudely comic scenes in which Frank is set up as a drunken rascal don't earn the film the credibility or emotional investment it demands in its later, weepier phase; and this unevenness draws attention to implausibilities that might be forgivable were it either funnier or more sincere throughout.

Frank's crimes – which amount to being late to pick up his nice, well-adjusted son and take him to a gig, and paying said son's private-school fees by working as a dildo salesman – are inescapably unequal to the punishment imposed, whereby he is led to believe that he is dying. The conceit of having Orla O'Rourke play three parts – Frank's ex-wife, kept call girl and possible alternative love interest – shows the actress's versatility and appeal but adds nothing other than an incongruous layer of arty ambiguity and the unpleasant hint that all women are essentially the same. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Andres Dussan

Written by

Simon Nye

Costume Designer

Sophie Bugeaud

©Apropos.

ito Limited

Production Companies

Apropos.ito presents

an Apropos Down

Dog production

Executive Producer

Andres Dussan

Orla O'Rourke

Flora/Harriet/

Rachel

Tom Goodman-Hill

Dr Hill

Dylan Llewellyn

Sam

Naomi Battrick

Ella

Zora Bishop

Sophie

Poppy Drayton

Amy

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor

Miracle

Communications

UK, present day. Rachel watches agast as her ex-husband Frank throws himself out of a window in an apparent suicide.

Two weeks previously. Frustrated by Frank's irresponsibility and his failure to connect with their teenage son Sam, Rachel enlists an unscrupulous doctor to give him a fake diagnosis of poor health, to scare him into changing his behaviour. Told that death is imminent, Frank sells his flat, quits his job as a sex-toy salesman and spends quality time with Sam. Rachel realises that the deception has gone too far, but she is too late to prevent Frank's apparent suicide. However, aware of the plot, Frank has tricked her, and has in fact landed on a trampoline in the garden. Having realised the value of his family, Frank asks Rachel and Sam to take him back.

A documentary filmed in Jaffa, Israel. Pierre Dulaine, four-times world ballroom dance champion, visits the city where he was born in 1944 to Palestinian-Irish parents. The family was forced to leave during the civil war, but now Pierre returns with a mission of reconciliation, extending his Dancing Classrooms initiative, which has been highly successful in New York's public school system, to bring Jewish and Palestinian Israeli schoolchildren together through ballroom dancing. His first challenge, however, is to get the reluctant girls and boys to dance with each other. There's circumspection at first, but the idea of a dance competition fires the children's enthusiasm, and they begin to socialise with each other for the first time in their lives.

The day of the dance contest unites parents and children from both sides. All the competitors receive silver medals, and a school with a cross-community intake takes the trophy. Pierre departs but the programme continues.

The Duke of Burgundy

United Kingdom/Hungary 2014

Director: Peter Strickland

Certificate 18 104m 11s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Though never mentioned in the dialogue of writer-director Peter Strickland's third feature – after *Katalin Varga* (2009) and *Berberian Sound Studio* (2012) – the Duke of Burgundy is a small orange and brown butterfly whose declining population is mostly found in southern England.

It's also the only male presence in a film that takes place in a pocket universe populated solely by female entomologists who are in sadomasochistic relationships with each other.

As in *Berberian Sound Studio*, the opening credits are an expert (and, for long-term devotees, hugely seductive) pastiche of a form of continental exploitation film that, like the butterfly, has become scarce since the 1970s. Whereas the blood-spattered oratorio of *Berberian* evoked the *gialli* of Dario Argento or Sergio Martino, *The Duke* opts for shaky pinkish freeze-frames of a woman cycling through thick woods accompanied by the ululating voices of Cat's Eyes (Faris Badwan and Rachel Zeffira), suggesting the demi-mondish, oddly arty psychedelic sex-horror melodramas of Jesús Franco or Jean Rollin. Lorna, the disapproving neighbour who never responds to the cheery greetings of the lead characters, is played by Monica Swinn, once a stern, sensual presence in films by these fringe auteurs, appearing in Rollin's *Les Démoniaques* (1974) and *Phantasmes* (1975) and Franco's *Female Vampire* (1973) and *Exorcism* (1975). Strickland is one of contemporary cinema's great deadpans but his credits are as full of jokes as the frames of a MAD magazine parody: this is a rare movie to boast a credit for perfumes (and a "human toilet consultant") and to embed an enormous amount of entomological information in its long closing crawl.

Because heterosexuality (or even non-sadomasochism) isn't an option in this neck of the woods, it's a mistake to look at *The Duke of Burgundy* as specifically a lesbian movie and hold it up against, say, *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* (2013) or even *Mulholland Dr.* (2001). Here, the lifestyle depicted is not a minority affair but the absolute norm – as indicated by the charming, tactful and matter-of-fact 'carpenter' (Fatma Mohamed) called in to pitch a birthday present (a bed with a lockable compartment) from Cynthia to Evelyn, who admits that she's already sold one to a near neighbour. The sense of an artificial, enclosed world – akin to the single vegetated patch of the planet Solaris in Tarkovsky's film or the limbo beyond the cracked gravestone in Lucio Fulci's *The House by the Cemetery* (1981) – is intensified by slow pans across the perfectly coiffed, elegant-if-tweedy all-female audience sitting rapt at entomology lectures given at an institute that closes for the winter. Filling out the ranks of extras in a manner that the perpetually cash-strapped Franco would endorse are out-of-focus, pale-faced shop-window mannequins.

All this heightened unreality conjures up memories of 1970s artfilm preciousness (cf. Bruno Gantillon's *Servant and Mistress*, 1977) as well as the more disreputable euro-smut undercurrents of a decade that yielded numerous variants (including repeated essays by Franco) on *Venus*

**See Feature
on page 44**



In Jesús we trust: Chiara D'Anna

in *Furs* and de Sade's *Justine*, and compares and contrasts interestingly with the reclamation of similar source materials in the recent work of Hélène Cattet and Bruno Forzani (*Amer*, *The Strange Colour of Your Body's Tears*). However, inside this highly artificial cocoon is an acute study of the stresses and strains on any perfect relationship and the power shifts within even a lasting marriage. Given that much of the emotional impact comes from very slight variations in scenes played out over and over again, it's a credit to both the experienced Sidse Babett Knudsen (the prime minister in the Danish TV series *Borgen*) and the less well-known Chiara D'Anna (promoted from a secondary part in *Berberian Sound Studio*) and Strickland's very tactful handling of them that the simple story of a woman whose bad back makes her less enthusiastic about bedroom games than her partner cuts deeper than many a study of death, infidelity or psychosis.

There's a rack-focus shift as we realise that D'Anna's Evelyn, who at first seems an abused

servant, is dictating the course of the couple's life together, which – outside of moth studies – is wholly dedicated to sexual fulfilment, even if that involves being locked in a box or acting as a human toilet bowl (behind closed doors). Evelyn is eager to be punished for her transgressions, but less keen on Cynthia's snoring... and gets impatient when back pain prompts Cynthia to abandon corseted, fetishistic gear in favour of baggy pyjamas. For her pettiness, Evelyn is truly punished when Cynthia ignores their safe word ('pinastri', another moth) and rests comfy-soled feet on her face. Cynthia's final attempt at going through their scripted mistress-and-maid game, when she is on the point of complete emotional collapse, ranks among the best-played scenes in recent cinema. Of course, it's a film with its mysteries – including a remarkable hallucination that overdoses on moth imagery (and a soundscape of chittering insect noises) – but nevertheless it's extraordinarily lucid and deliciously entertaining. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Andy Starke

Written by

Peter Strickland

Cinematography

Nic Knowland

Editor

Mátyás Fekete

Production Design

Peter Sparrow

Music

Cat's Eyes

Sound Recording

Rob Entwistle

Dress and Lingerie

Andrea Flesch

©Rook Films (CD)

Ltd, The British Film Institute, Channel Four Television Corporation

Production Companies

Film4 and BFI present in association with Ripken Productions Ltd and Protagonist Pictures a Rook Films production

In association with Ripken Productions Ltd and Protagonist Pictures for Film4 and the BFI

Developed with the

support of Film4

Made with the

support of the

BFI's Film Fund

Supported by

the Hungarian

Film Incentive

Executive Producers

Lizze Francke

Anna Higgs

Amy Jump

Ildiko Kemeny

Ben Wheatley

Cast

Sidse Babett

Knudsen

Cynthia

Chiara D'Anna

Evelyn

Eugenia Caruso

Dr Fraxini

Zita Kraszkó

Dr Schüller

Monica Swinn

Lorna

Eszter Tompa

Dr Viridiana

Fatma Mohamed

carpenter

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Curzon Film World

Somewhere in Europe, sometime in the past. Evelyn arrives at a country house where she cleans for Cynthia, an entomologist who specialises in moths. When Evelyn fails in small tasks, the older Cynthia 'punishes' her. This punishment becomes consensual and the lovers live together, with the seemingly submissive Evelyn issuing strict instructions to the dominant Cynthia. However, their relationship becomes troubled when Cynthia, suffering from back pain, finds it increasingly

burdensome to indulge Evelyn's fantasies. When Lorna, a spiteful neighbour, tells Cynthia that she has seen Evelyn polishing another woman's boots, Cynthia responds by becoming genuinely cruel and punitive in a manner that Evelyn does not enjoy. After this crisis, and a seemingly shared hallucination involving moths, Cynthia is unable to go through with their regular charade and breaks down. Evelyn comforts her and the couple reaffirm their love.

Dying of the Light

USA/Bahamas 2014
Director: Paul Schrader
Certificate 18 93m 56s

Reviewed by Mark Sinker

There's a line in one of Balzac's novels which says that no one understands the sweetness and the value of friendship better than the spy, who must constantly betray it. It's a nicely perverse idea – territory worked by Conrad, Mailer and Le Carré in their time – and suggests a promising concept deep buried in the hokiness of this film's final version: because, of course, despite the billing, director Paul Schrader was removed at the final edit stage. The tale of an ageing and seriously mentally impaired agent's return to the field to confront his dying nemesis is no bad idea, and with Schrader in charge and Nicolas Cage as agent Evan Lake, truths might have been explored – about masculinity in extremis, about the rituals of companionship and enmity, about militant ideologies that mirror one another, about what drives and what abides above mere local politics, and about why.

As it is, well. The version of the CIA we're given – a bumbling ineffectual bureaucracy in which good men must go rogue to get the right thing done – is ludicrous in 2015. Lake and his younger colleague Schultz (Anton Yelchin) can efficiently slit a throat or kill with only their thumbs, but there's nothing here about extraordinary rendition or the international archipelago of dark sites, and the only torture we encounter is strictly the artisanal stuff that was inflicted on Lake by fanatical jihadi terrorist Muhammad Banir (Alexander Karim) back in 1992.

Cage is Cage: he can switch from unpredictable sociopath to ruefully adorable in a beat, watchably energising worse material even than this, sometimes by goofy haircut alone. And there are intermittent glimpses of the Schrader of yore. In a film that largely plays out against corporately bland backdrops (the agency's offices and conference rooms, the corridors and lobbies of generic international hotels), there's a scene in which Lake and Schultz sit cross-legged side by side on twin beds in a hotel room, using laptops, and it's as richly lit as one of the fantasy sequences in the director's 1985 film *Mishima*. Lake stoops, just before the final confrontation, to smell a plant – you think he's savouring the last moments before going into action, but he's actually just checking his malfunctioning



Lost honour: Nicolas Cage

sense of smell. Banir, similarly, lingers on his balcony, gazing out at the fading light over Mombasa. He isn't quite the usual dark-skinned Middle East baddie of a fifth-grade thriller, all shrieking sadism and incomprehensible hate: Karim salts a dry masked glee with a melancholy stillness, and there's a blurred plot twist that's perhaps intended to complicate things.

It's hard to know if Lake is to be seen as a wounded maverick – the last honourable man – or as a noisy, damaged fool. Certainly he has come to loathe the CIA as is, while Banir finally (and confusedly) reveals that the institutions of revolutionary Islam have failed him. Bereft of faith, without family, ill and out of the game, both men by the end seem to be manipulating their encounter towards their own death, a good death for an agent, in action. Somewhere in here, perhaps lost on the cutting-room floor, perhaps never realised, there's a film in which the two of them mirror or even amplify each other's sense of honour; even briefly recognise a moment of companionship before other loyalties violently kick in. But all potential virtues are lost now, smothered in endless, toneless scenes of exposition and an unwatchable welter of featureless secondary characters. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Scott Clayton
Gary A. Hirsch
Todd Williams
Producer
David Grovick
Written by
Paul Schrader
Director of Photography
Gabriel Koush
Editor
Tim Silano
Production Designer
Russell Barnes
Music
Frederik Wiedmann
Production Mixer
Dragos Stanomir
Costume Designer
Oana Păunescu

©Dying of the Light, LLC

Production Companies
Red Granite Entertainment and Tin Res Entertainment present an Over Under Media production
A Paul Schrader film
Executive Producers
Christian Mercuri
Antony Mitchell
Nicolas Winding Refn
Steve Schwartz
Barry Brooker
Stan Wertlieb
Cast
Nicolas Cage
Evan Lake
Anton Yelchin
Milton Schultz
Alexander Karim
Muhammad Banir
Irène Jacob
Michelle Zubairain
Adetomiwa Edun
Mbui
Aymen Hamdouchi
Aasim
Robert G. Slade
James Clifron
Claudius Peters
Ghedi
Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]
Part-subtitled
Distributor
Signature Entertainment

US, present day. Desk-bound senior agent Evan Lake learns that his nemesis Muhammad Banir is still alive. Banir tortured Lake so severely 22 years ago that Lake was unable to return to work as a field agent. Lake now suffers from a degenerative brain condition. Banir is also ill, and to help alleviate his terminal blood disease, he is obtaining an experimental drug from Bucharest. With the aid of his younger colleague Milton Schultz and old flame Michelle Zubairain, Lake goes after Banir. After questioning the Bucharest doctor supplying the drug, he switches identities with him and flies to Mombasa, where he meets the dying Banir. Confused by memories of their earlier encounter, when Banir tortured him, Lake leaves Banir alive and returns to his hotel, telling Schultz that he has killed him. Banir's underlings attack the hotel, and Schultz is shot. Lake kills Banir. Suffering an episode of mental collapse, he is himself killed in a traffic accident. He is buried with honours in Arlington National Cemetery.

Goodbye to Language

France 2014
Director: Jean-Luc Godard
Certificate 69m 20s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Unapologetically hyperbolic during his own years as a critic, Jean-Luc Godard has rarely inspired indifference with his filmmaking. If he is a cinematic genius, as he is to a great many, he is the greatest of cinematic geniuses. (David Bordwell, who has written the most in-depth English-language analysis of *Goodbye to Language* that I know, coined the term 'Godardolater'.) If he is a fraud, as some others contend, then he is the most egregious fraud of all time.

My own feelings on the man whom François Truffaut memorably called "the Ursula Andress of militancy" and Raymond Durgat called Chris Marker's "boring sidekick" (in 1968) lie somewhere between these poles, and *Goodbye to Language*, Godard's new 70-minute 3D movie, is not a film to make a final judgement easy – though a number of esteem-worthy critics have had no compunction in calling it the best film of the past year.

Goodbye to Language contains only a handful of performers, locations and situations, though they are difficult enough to keep track of thanks to Godard's process of ceaseless obfuscation. Camera position is strategically disadvantageous. Action often takes place in offscreen space, while framing inverts the traditional hierarchies of the essential and trivial. Scenes are separated by uncommented-on ellipses of indeterminate length. Original material is striated with uncontextualised news footage and clips from other films, a few of the latter also visible on a flat-screen television that's on in the background during quarrelsome domestic scenes. Dialogue and soundtrack cues are cut just before conclusion or swelling climax, Godard always prankishly pulling the plug on scenes at the least opportune moment, just as they've begun to go somewhere.

Beginning *Goodbye to Language* with two recast variations on the same scene – a man and a young woman meet and quarrel on the shores of Lake Geneva – Godard seems to be challenging the viewer to guess which is the 'real' movie. (The answer is: neither.) In the second 'take', Godard employs not for the last time a kind of 'split screen', which is the nearest his film comes to justifying claims of its revolutionary accomplishment – it's unlike anything I've seen before, and on the first viewing I felt as though I might detach my retinas trying to process it. Its stereographic images were achieved through shooting with two parallel cameras, and the wall-eyed effect in question is created by breaking their alignment, as one moves to cover action and the other stays put.

The deviating, blurring dual cameras are a visual corollary to the doppelganger structure that Godard keeps up through much of the film. The actors playing the two couples resemble one another so closely as to be nearly interchangeable, as do the film's 'halves': in 'La Métaphore', scenes from the first segment, 'La Nature', are reprised, revised, corrected and undermined. Both men, for example, are seen practising *philosophie dans la toilette*, their musings accompanied by vivid plops of which the Farrelly brothers would be proud. The film's final major character is 'Roxy', played by Godard's pet dog with



Strangeness at the lake: Zoé Bruneau

his partner Anne-Marie Miéville. Roxy is acquired by Josette and Gédéon (and only by them) during a stop at a petrol station. She belongs wholly to neither 'half' of the film, but is something like its roving consciousness.

Along with Roxy's meanderings, various motifs stitch the film's two sections together, the most prominent of these being that of water: rain on pavements and slush on windshields, water from showers and fountains, rivers and lakes. The

debate is whether *Goodbye to Language* is a shallow, stagnant puddle or contains profound depths – "What's difficult is to fit flatness into depth," as one of its tossed-off pronouncements goes. Most of the dialogue fragments are divisible between the trite ("If Russians become Europeans, they'll never be Russians again) and the foreboding ("[Images] are the murder of the present"; "Soon, everyone will need an interpreter to understand the words coming from their own mouths").

Perhaps it isn't the best approach to give too much weight to words in a film that is, after all, called *Goodbye to Language*. It is a fairly ravishing movie, strewn with flowers, fresh-cut and wilted and growing wild, saturated colour levels rendering them as solid de Staél-esque impastos of red. It is a bouquet of textures, attributable to a variety of postproduction filters and technologies – Godard lists his cameras, many of them less-than-state-of-the-art consumer jobs, in the closing credits, right alongside the composers from whose work he has created the découpage of the film's sonic element.

It is no stretch to make a case for the structural audacity and pure plastic beauty of what Godard has made, but I've yet to hear a convincing argument for the way in which his political-historical digressions (Che Guevara and Mao Zedong, helicopters and gas chambers) have been integrated into his structural architectonics, or that there is some particular signification in, say, his hard cut between footage of a Nazi motorcade and the Tour de France. At this point in Godard's work you just wait for World War II to show up like you wait for the cameo in Hitchcock. Which is not a way of churlishly saying "*laissez tomber* about Hitler already, JLG," but the effect is a work that radically defamiliarises the everyday while at the same time banalising historical tragedy.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Alain Sarde
Brahim Chioua
Vincent Maraval
Screenplay
Jean-Luc Godard
Photography
Fabrice Aragno
Costumes
Aude Grivas

Production Companies

CNC, Canal Plus,
Wild Bunch

Cast

Héloïse Godet
Josette
Kamel Abdelli
Gédéon
Richard Chevallier
Marcus
Zoé Bruneau
Ivitch
Christian Gregori
Davidson
Jessica Erickson
Mary Shelley
In Colour
[1.78:1]

Subtitles

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor

Studiocanal Limited
French theatrical title
Adieu au langage

Crew members' specific jobs are not cited on screen.

A ferry on Lake Geneva arrives at a pier. Davidson, a middle-aged academic, reads from Solzhenitsyn and Jacques Ellul and a book on the painter Nicolas de Staél. A man arrives to confront a young woman, and a lovers' quarrel ensues. This scene is played twice, the essential difference being that each 'take' features a different woman of similar appearance, one identified as Josette, the other as Ivitch. Two parallel stories – 'La Nature' and 'La Métaphore' – unfold. In the first, Josette lives with a hirsute man named Gédéon; in the second, Ivitch lives with a hirsute man named Marcus. Josette and Gédéon acquire a stray dog, Roxy, who is later seen, seemingly abandoned, at the edge of a lake, where Mary Shelley appears.

Hinterland

United Kingdom 2014
Director: Harry Macqueen
Certificate 15 78m 10s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

There isn't much separating Harry Macqueen's *Hinterland* from scores of handmade HD home movies. But the little bit of buffer room created by the performances by the director and singer Lori Campbell as long-time friends on a will-they-won't-they weekend at a cottage in Cornwall goes a long way.

The attempted poeticism of Macqueen's filmmaking – intimate close-ups juxtaposed with wide shots of landscapes and blurry interludes – is hit-and-miss, and while the relaxed, improvised dialogue suggests a bond between the cast mates, the characters aren't necessarily that vivid: they're directionless twentysomethings prematurely nostalgic for their childhoods, and they may or may not secretly be in love with one another. And yet the cabin-bound set-up is so evocative, and both the people on screen so likeable – cozily swaddled in sweatshirts and toques against the cold, playing late-night walkie-talkie games in separate beds – that it's hard to begrudge them this microscopically scaled showcase.

Give Macqueen (who acted in Richard Linklater's *Me and Orson Welles*) credit for making a movie under the sign of *Before Sunrise* that doesn't borrow overmuch, and does its own thing, off quietly in the corner, where filmgoers who like their love stories wistful would be well advised to seek it out.



Cabin fever: Lori Campbell, Harry Macqueen

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Harry Macqueen
Written by

Harry Macqueen

Photographed by

Ben Hecking

Edited by

Alice Petit

Music

Composed by

Graham Hadfield

Sound Design

Helen Miles

©Inheritance Films

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Inheritance Films

Cast

Lori Campbell

Lola

Harry Macqueen

Harvey

London, the present. Harvey and Lola are both in their early twenties and haven't seen each other for several years. Learning that Lola has returned to the UK from America, Harvey invites her to spend a weekend at his family's cottage in Cornwall, where they played together as children. Once there, they discuss their relationships and aspirations for life, and on the last night of the trip sleep side by side in the same bed in the attic. They resolve to meet up at a concert in the city, but the film ends without them coming together again.

Hyena

United Kingdom 2014
Director: Gerard Johnson
Certificate 18 112m 4s

See Feature
on page 36

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

This stylish police corruption thriller comes from writer-director Gerard Johnson, whose low-budget debut *Tony* (2009) won plaudits for its combination of grimy urban realism, black humour and casual ultra-violence. The same trio of attributes makes *Hyena* an enjoyable addition to a well-trodden Brit-flick genre. Its basic plot may be derivative but there's a winning mixture of blood and guts, guilty laughs and serious soul-searching as we follow the headlong downward spiral of hard-man cop Michael Logan (Peter Ferdinando, who also starred in *Tony*). Logan is not a monster at heart but he's in an ugly mess, attempting to square off his dodgy business dealings with the local gangster contingent while staying under the radar of Nick Taylor (Richard Dormer), the anti-corruption investigator who has him in his sights. Johnson accelerates the pace mercilessly right from the atmospheric prologue, in which a dramatic raid on a nightclub unfolds against a pounding electronic score to create a kind of hellish dream sequence set in a world where no one can tell the angels and the devils apart.

Logan and his team – known as Task Force – are an elite anti-drug unit who feel no qualms about dishing out brutal beatings during the raid and then siphoning off the cash and drugs for their own after-work all-nighter. Logan's three colleagues provide much of the film's dark comedy – particularly baby-faced maniac Martin (Neil Maskell) and wisecracking racist Keith (Tony Pitts). Ferdinando portrays Logan himself with an almost unbearable intensity of desperate focus and ratcheting despair. Unlike any other man in the film (and yes, they are nearly all men), he retains a sliver of morality and has a weak spot in the form of his sweet-natured girlfriend Lisa (MyAnna Buring); when a pair of vicious Albanians (played



Old school: Peter Ferdinando

with unforgettable menace by Orli Shuka and Gjevat Kelmendi) move into the area, he is torn between his financial interests and his horror at their cold-blooded ferocity.

Johnson's script bristles with smart dialogue and he directs with an impressively assured visual style, suffusing his cramped interiors with a claustrophobic gloom. Along with the feverish pace and the strong performances, one of the strengths of the film is its authentic sense of place: the grubby pavements and peeling stucco that lurk around the edges of prosperous west London are unblinkingly presented and help to create a sense that greed, violence and exploitation are the eternal truth of the capital, undiminished by any amount of tattering-up. Logan, too, wears an antique air along with his battered leather jacket, as if still living in the decades when bent police were untouchable. Ultimately, though, that cosy framework of corruption is unavailable to him and he is left in a moral vacuum; his old-school cynicism trumped by the obliterating nihilism of the new normal.

For all its gags, gore and enjoyable genre kicks, this is at heart a sorrowful film in which no good deed goes unpunished. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Stephen Woolley
Joanna Laurie
Elizabeth Karlsen

Written by

Gerard Johnson

Director of Photography

Benjamin Kracun

Editor

Ian Davies

Production Designer

Marie Lanna

Original Soundtrack

The The

Sound Recordist

Stevie Haywood

Costume Designer

Suzie Harman

©Hyena Film

Productions Limited/

The British Film

Institute/Channel

Four Television

Corporation

Production

Companies

Film4 and BFI

present a Number 9

Films production

Produced in

association with

Riggins Productions

Limited and

LipSync LLP

In association
with Compton
Investments

Made with the
support of the
BFI's Film Fund

Developed with the
assistance of Film4

Executive Producers

Katherine Butler

Sam Lavender

Norman Merry

David Knight

Philip Arditti

Cem Dikman

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Metrodome

Distribution Ltd

Cast

Peter Ferdinando

Michael Logan

Neil Maskell

Martin

Richard Dormer

Nick Taylor

Elisa Lasowski

Ariana

MyAnna Buring

Lisa

Tony Pitts

Keith

Gordon Brown

Chris

Orli Shuka

Nikolla Kabashi

Gjevat Kelmendi

Rezar Kabashi

Stephen Graham

London, present day. Corrupt officer Michael Logan, head of the Metropolitan Police's narcotics Task Force, is juggling an escalating addiction problem and a secret collaboration with Cem, a scion of the local Turkish drug cartel. When Cem is murdered, Logan's financial investment in a new smuggling route across Europe is jeopardised, and he offers to collaborate instead with upstart Albanian brothers the Kabashis, who are attempting a gangland takeover. Meanwhile, Logan is alarmed to find that anti-corruption officer Nick Taylor is sniffing around. Reluctantly, Logan agrees to join forces with an old colleague he distrusts, David Knight, to bring down the Kabashis, while also continuing his covert business dealings with them. During a meeting with the Albanians, Logan realises that Knight is secretly taping the conversation, and in the ensuing fracas, the Kabashis kill Knight. Realising that he is being framed by Taylor, and with his Task Force colleagues Chris, Martin and Keith now under arrest for corruption, Logan is desperate. He has taken responsibility for a trafficked girl, Ariana, who has helped him with information about the Albanian gang, and now both the Kabashis and Taylor are pursuing him. Logan hides Ariana in a safe house, where his girlfriend Lisa looks after her. He murders Taylor but discovers that Martin has betrayed him, and the Kabashis have taken Ariana and Lisa hostage. Sitting in his car outside the house, he steals himself for a gunfight that surely cannot end well.

It Follows

USA 2014
Director: David Robert Mitchell
Certificate 15 100m 12s

See Feature
on page 34

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Horror stories are routinely compared to nightmares. Robert Louis Stevenson said the idea for his "fine bogey tale" *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

came to him in a nightmare, while Bram Stoker claimed that he dreamed up *Dracula* after dining "on a surfeit of dressed crab". Writer-director David Robert Mitchell (*The Myth of the American Sleepover*) admits that the basic scary idea of *It Follows* comes from a recurring dream he experienced as a child – the not uncommon terror of being pursued by something relatively slow but relentless. The notion informs horror/suspense classics such as *Halloween* (1978) and *The Terminator* (1984) – and gives rise to the often lampooned slasher-film cliché of the killer ambling at his leisure after victims who run away at top speed but keep tripping up or spraining an ankle in order that they can be murdered – but it has seldom been used as simply and effectively as here.

A prologue featuring the gruesome death of a previous victim, who runs to the shore and can go no further before her fate catches up with her, makes clear the fatal consequences of being tagged by the pursuer. After this shock, the rest of the film gets scares simply by having the mute, murderous spirit walk towards heroine Jay at an even pace, unseen except by those who have been cursed. The follower takes the form of many people – a few recognisable, most not. In the climax, it appears to Jay as her absent (dead?) father; earlier, it kills Jay's ex Greg while in the form of his (living) mother, battering at his bedroom door, and shows itself to a briefly uncursed Jay creeping into Greg's house while looking like a sleepwalking Greg. Most of the forms it takes are unexplained, but they seem – in the mode of the unquiet dead of *The Sixth Sense* or the grudge-holding spooks of J-horror – to be atrocity victims, with a relatively high incidence of naked, bloodied women, though there's also an unusually tall man and a couple of folks who seem simply dazed or unconcerned. Of course, a few red herrings walk into the frame, only to be identified as harmless.

Having dreamed up a fresh horror menace, Mitchell explores the logic of his own invented mythology. There's plainly a subtext about STDs and casual sex – the curse's means of passing from one victim to the next. Jay is shocked by the sudden transformation of her seemingly caring boyfriend after she's had sex with him in the back of his car: he drugs her and then ties her to a chair "for her own good" to show her an incarnation of the follower stumbling towards them. Even after she's convinced of her peril, Jay is most upset by the callous treatment he has meted out to her. His assurance that she'll have no trouble finding someone else to have sex with in order to pass on the curse – because "you're pretty" – only makes things worse. This is not a story about a woman punished for having sex, but an indictment of the calculating guy who gets out from under the curse by passing it on to an innocent. Jay agonises about the moral implications of following suit in a way he didn't even consider.

Unusually in contemporary horror, Mitchell surrounds his heroine with friends



Don't look back: Jake Weary, Maika Monroe

and relatives who are sympathetic to her plight and do their best to help, even if it puts them in jeopardy too. Note, however, the spark of opportunism in Jay's male would-be saviours as they volunteer to sleep with her for her own good.

The film is deliberately vague about when it's set. The inspired use of depopulated, post-industrial Detroit (also a locus of the supernatural in *Only Lovers Left Alive*) gives *It Follows* a sense of economic apocalypse, but the film is almost as stylised as *Brick* (or, as Mitchell says, *Peanuts*) in its depiction of a world with few adult presences, where kids have to cope with their own problems by themselves but also have the freedom to

take off for days on end to fight monsters.

Mitchell uses the widescreen frame in the manner of vintage John Carpenter, while Disasterpeace (aka Rich Vreeland) contributes a score that evokes Carpenter's insistent synth sounds but forges its own unique, nerve-scraping identity. Bright spark Maika Monroe, also the 'final girl' in last year's *The Guest*, leads a young, comparatively unfamiliar cast; in contrast to the way 'kids' are represented in much contemporary genre cinema (cf. Eli Roth, Rob Zombie), Mitchell is sensitive to the complicated nuances of teenage friendship, rooting the horror in relationships that are believable and affecting. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Rebecca Green
Laura D. Smith
David Robert Mitchell
David Kaplan
Erik Rommesmo
Written by
David Robert Mitchell
Director of Photography
Michael Gioulakis
Edited by
Julio C. Perez IV

Production Designer
Michael T. Perry
Original Music
Disasterpeace
Sound Mixer
Clayton Perry
Costume Designer
Kimberly Leitz-McCauley
Executive Producers
©It Will Follow, Inc
Production Companies

Northern Lights Films presents an Animal Kingdom production in association with Two Flints
A film by David Robert Mitchell
Visit Films, Animal Kingdom.
Northern Lights Films
Frederick W. Green
Joshua Astrachan
P. Jennifer Dana

Jeff Schlossman
Bill Wallwork
Alan Pao
Corey Large
Mia Chang
Film Extracts
Killers from Space (1954)

Cast
Maika Monroe
Jay Height

Keir Gilchrist
Paul
Daniel Zovatto
Greg Hannigan
Jake Weary
Hugh/Jeff
Olivia Luccardi
Yara
Lili Sepe
Kelly Height
Bailey Spy
Annie

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Icon Film Distribution

Suburban Detroit. Jay, a teenage girl, has been dating Hugh for a few weeks. After they have sex, Hugh explains that he has passed on to her a curse, which manifests in the form of a slow-walking, shapeshifting spirit that will follow her at walking pace and kill her if it catches up; he also tells her that she can pass the curse on by sleeping with someone else. Jay convinces her sister and best friend that she is cursed. They track down Hugh, who is really called Jeff; he explains that if Jay is killed,

the curse will come back to him. After an encounter with the follower leaves Jay hospitalised, she has sex with old boyfriend Greg – who is quickly killed by a spectre in the shape of his mother. Jay and her friends set a trap for the follower in a derelict swimming pool, hoping to electrocute it, but it proves too clever to be destroyed. Jay sleeps with Paul, who has always had a crush on her, and he heads off in search of a prostitute. Later, Jay and Paul are uncertain whether the curse has really been lifted.

Kill the Messenger

Director: Michael Cuesta

Reviewed by Jason Anderson

In an early chapter of *Kill the Messenger* – his 2006 book on the late American journalist Gary Webb and 'Dark Alliance', the controversial series of articles about crack, the Contras and the CIA that would derail his career – Nick Schou shares a valuable observation by Greg Wolf, one of Webb's closest friends. "Gary wasn't afraid of anything," he says. "It was sort of a character flaw."

Director Michael Cuesta's compelling account of Webb's professional and personal unmaking, *Kill the Messenger* also functions as a discomfiting cautionary tale about the potential ramifications of the fearlessness and stubbornness that typically yield more reassuring results in dramas about intrepid journalists on quests for the truth. For Webb – played here by Jeremy Renner in his meatiest performance since his Oscar-nominated turn as a similarly single-minded bomb-disposal expert in *The Hurt Locker* (2008) – many of the qualities that make him a courageous reporter leave him ill prepared for the character-assassination campaign that follows his big scoop. Convinced of the rightness of his actions and bewildered by the hostility he incurs from his peers, Webb is tragically slow to comprehend the catastrophe unfolding around him. That's especially clear after his fellow journalists target him with the same degree of scrutiny that Webb might've reserved for the shadowiest players in 'Dark Alliance'. As one of his editors at the witch-hunt's onset puts it: "It's not about the story – it's about you now."

It's at this point that the more familiar ace-reporter bravado in Renner's performance shifts into something more haunting. Moving between expressions of confusion, hurt pride, anger and despair, the actor conveys the full extent of the damage when Webb's most dearly held principles – as well as his outsized ego – are dealt a mortal blow. And given that his sociable nature is so strongly emphasised in the early scenes, it's affecting to see Webb become so completely isolated from his family and from his dwindling number of professional allies.

Faced with the formidable task of making a film that's about the story *and* the man, Cuesta and screenwriter Peter Landesman largely rise to the challenge, even if they are sometimes stymied in their own noble ambitions. The need to provide historical context for the 'Dark Alliance' stories creates some clunkiness, such as whenever the action is interrupted by rapid-fire montages of news footage intended to catch up viewers on the facts of the Iran-Contra scandal that made an unlikely celebrity out of Colonel Oliver North in the late 1980s. Efforts to condense the contents of 'Dark Alliance' – which Landesman rightly describes as "gargantuan and labyrinthine" – also creates some confusion, as does the portrayal of fateful flaws in the reporting and editing of Webb's story. Viewers may want to consult Schou's book for the finer points, though the filmmakers are wise to emphasise how the provocative display copy and lead-page imagery contributed to the false impression that Webb's story suggested the CIA was actively selling drugs. Rather, his intention was to expose a more traditional activity for the agency: turning a blind eye to the criminal



Crack shot: Andy Garcia, Jeremy Renner

activities of its most unsavoury friends.

Though there's more room for such nuances in political thrillers than in other contemporary genres, there's also a higher risk of stranding viewers in the murk. Perhaps that's why Cuesta and Landesman can't resist juicing up an otherwise despondent third act with a hammy appearance by Ray Liotta as a Deep Throat-like ex-spy who confirms for Webb and for the audience that his story was pretty much right about everything, even if the true scale of the state-sanctioned evil must remain beyond our understanding. It feels like an excessively simplistic gesture in a movie that otherwise works hard to avoid reductive and hackneyed conventions.

More effective are the scenes of Webb and

his wife Sue (a strong if underused Rosemarie DeWitt) as they contend with the scandal's destructive impact. No small element in *Kill the Messenger*, these glimpses of the Webbs' newly fraught domestic life boast some of the intimacy Cuesta achieved in *L.I.E.* (2001) and *12 and Holding* (2005), the raw-edged adolescent dramas that preceded his stints on TV hits *Homeland* and *Dexter*. Another indication that the film may ultimately be more astute about the personal than the political comes in the final sequence, when a grandstanding moment more typical of one of Oliver Stone's assaults on the pillars of power is revealed as merely the fantasy of someone who's been irrevocably damaged in the service of his principles. A more fearful man may have seen it all coming. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Scott Stuber
Naomi Despres
Jeremy Renner
Written by
Peter Landesman
Based on the books
Dark Alliance by
Gary Webb and
Kill the Messenger
by Nick Schou
**Director of
Photography**

Edited by

Brian A. Kates
Production Designer
John Paino
Music
Nathan Johnson
Sound Mixer
Aron Siegel
Costume Designer
Kimberly Adams
Production

Companies

Focus Features
presents a Bluegrass
Films production
A film by Michael
Cuesta
Executive Producers
Peter Landesman
Pamela Abdy
Don Handfield
Michael Bederman

Cast

Jeremy Renner
Gary Webb
Rosemarie DeWitt
Sue Webb
Ray Liotta
John Cullen
Tim Blake Nelson
Alan Fenster
Barry Pepper
Russell Dodson
Oliver Platt
Jerry Ceppos

Michael Sheen

Fred Weil
Michael Kenneth
Williams
Ricky Ross, 'Freeway'
Mary Elizabeth
Winstead
Anna Simons
Andy Garcia
Norwin Meneses
Paz Vega
Coral Baca
Yul Vazquez

Oscar Danilo Blandón

**Dolby Digital
In Colour**
[2.35:1]
Distributor
Universal Pictures
International
UK & Eire

San Jose, 1996. Journalist Gary Webb has moved with his wife and sons from Cleveland to California to write for the 'San Jose Mercury News'. He is contacted by Coral Baca, who tells him that her Nicaraguan boyfriend sold drugs in the US with the help of the CIA. Webb becomes interested in the boyfriend's relationship with Oscar Blandón, a narcotics trafficker who has ties with the Contra rebels and US officials. After meetings with Ricky Ross, an imprisoned Los Angeles drug dealer, and Norwin Meneses, another Blandón associate in jail in Nicaragua, Webb convinces his editors that he has the makings of a feature that will chart the links between the CIA's covert funding of the Contras and the crack epidemic in the US.

Webb's 'Dark Alliance' stories are published simultaneously in print and online. Journalists at several major papers attempt to discredit Webb and his story. Initially supportive, Webb's editors eventually reassigned him to another bureau, forcing him to separate from his family. While living in a hotel in Cupertino, Webb meets John Cullen, an ex-CIA agent who hints at a wider conspiracy. At an awards ceremony, Webb imagines using his time on the podium to lash out at his critics, but instead he holds his tongue as he accepts an award.

Postscripts refer to the CIA's later acknowledgement of misdeeds reported in 'Dark Alliance', and to Webb's suicide in 2004.

Kingsman The Secret Service

USA/United Kingdom 2015, Director: Matthew Vaughn
Certificate 15 128m 34s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

In the prologue to Mark Millar's six-part comic-book series *The Secret Service*, a British agent rescues the actor Mark Hamill, star of the original *Star Wars* trilogy, from the clutches of a supervillain who is collecting the SF stars of his youth. Attempting to reprise the opening escapade of *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977), the agent and Hamill plummet over a snowy cliff to a bathetic death after their Union Jack parachute fails to open properly. In other words, Millar's comic is a James Bond parody set both in a reflexive world of movie geekdom and in a 'broken Britain'. *Kingsman: The Secret Service* plays a similar game, but director Matthew Vaughn and co-writer Jane Goldman (who together previously adapted Millar's *Kick-Ass*) also deviate from their comic-book model. The real Hamill may duly cameo, but as an ecology academic rather than as himself – and there will be other changes to plot and characterisation along the way, ensuring plenty of quirky surprises for anyone familiar with the original.

Whenever gentleman spy Harry Hart (Colin Firth) and lisping criminal mastermind Raymond Valentine (Samuel L. Jackson, who himself overcame a childhood lisp) engage, they expressly discuss spy movies. "Nowadays, they're all a little serious for my taste," complains Hart, bringing to mind not just Matt Damon's Bourne and Daniel Craig's Bond but also *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (2011), starring Firth himself. Indeed, *Kingsman* restores the campy fun of Roger Moore-era Bond to a contemporary British landscape where class divisions, though present, are also evolving. When Hart is called on to help young housing-estate chancer Gary 'Eggsy' Unwin (impressive newcomer Taron Egerton) as part of a blood debt to Eggsy's late father, he sees potential in the twentysomething lad, and recruits him to compete with other hopefuls for a position as a new agent with the Kingsman secret service.

There is a double standard operating here, since Eggsy is contrasted with his snobbish Oxbridge rivals but still, like them, depends on family connections to get his foot in the Kingsman door. To beat one elite political establishment, Eggsy must join another. Still, double standards abound in a film that simultaneously offers a critique of the superspy genre's mainstays of sex and violence while also celebrating them to gleeful excess. Eggsy's colleague Roxy (Sophie Cookson) and Valentine's blade-legged henchwoman Gazelle (male in the original comic but here played by Sofia Boutella)



His word is his Bond: Colin Firth

 may represent unusually strong female characters for the genre, but any points gained for gender progress are quickly lost again in the portrayal of an initially principled Swedish princess (Hanna Alström) who, in one of the film's more misjudged and regressive moments of supposed comedy, promises her own anal cavity as a sexual reward for a world-saving Eggsy.

Conversely, the violence is mostly cartoonish, though one particular sequence – in which master spy Hart, sent into an involuntary homicidal rage, single-handedly massacres a churchful of hate preachers – manages to be exciting and uncomfortable all at once, perfectly illustrating the way that Kingsman gets to surveil its cake and eat it too. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Matthew Vaughn
David Reid
Adam Bohling
Screenplay
Jane Goldman
Matthew Vaughn
Based on the comic book *The Secret Service* by Mark Millar, Dave Gibbons

Director of Photography

George Richmond
Edited by

Eddie Hamilton

Jon Harris

Production Designer

Paul Kirby

Music

Henry Jackman
Matthew Margeson

Production Sound Mixer

Simon Hayes
Costume Designer
Arianne Phillips

©Twentieth Century Fox Film

Corporation and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC

Production Companies
Twentieth Century Fox and Marv present a Cloudy production A Matthew Vaughn film Made in association with TSG

Executive Producers

Mark Millar
Dave Gibbons
Stephen Marks
Claudia Vaughn
Pierre Lagrange

Cast

Colin Firth
Harry Hart, 'Galahad'
Samuel L. Jackson

Raymond Valentine

Mark Strong

Merlin

Taron Egerton

Gary 'Eggsy' Unwin

Sophie Cookson

Roxy

Jack Davenport

Lancelot

Mark Hamill

Professor Arnold

Sofia Boutella

Gazelle

Edward Holcroft

Charlie

Jack Cutmore-Scott

Rufus

Geoff Bell

Dean

Samantha Womack

Michelle Unwin

Michael Caine

Arthur

Hanna Alström

Princess Tilde

Dolby Digital/ Dolby Atmos In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor

20th Century Fox International (UK)

The Middle East, the 1990s. An agent from the Kingsman secret service gives his life to save colleague Harry Hart.

Seventeen years later, Hart repays the debt by rescuing the dead agent's delinquent twentysomething son Gary 'Eggsy' Unwin from police custody in London and offering him the chance to compete with other candidates for a vacancy at the Kingsman agency. Hart is investigating multibillionaire telecommunications entrepreneur Raymond Valentine, who plots – with the connivance of international politicians – to forestall overpopulation and ecological disaster via a phone-chip signal that will make humans turn murderously on one another.

Eggsy passes most of the trial stages to become an agent but fails at the final hurdle, when he refuses an order to shoot his pet dog. Acrophobic Roxy becomes the next Kingsman agent. While following a lead in America, Hart is exposed to an experimental burst of Valentine's signal, and kills a bigoted church congregation. Confused by his own actions, Hart confronts Valentine outside the church, and is shot dead. After outwitting Arthur, the Kingsman chief (who has secretly gone over to Valentine's side), Eggsy rushes to Valentine's arctic base. While Roxy takes out the signal-emitting satellite, Eggsy fights Valentine's men and his blade-legged henchwoman Gazelle. Kingsman's new chief Merlin causes circuits implanted in the heads of the armed guards and the complicit politicians to explode. Eggsy kills Valentine.

Kumiko the Treasure Hunter

USA 2013

Director: David Zellner
Certificate 12A 104m 36s

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Almost 20 years after its release, the Coen brothers' black comedy-cum-thriller *Fargo* is undergoing something of a cultural moment. Noah Hawley's dark-hued TV spinoff has been commissioned for a second series, and now, in *Kumiko the Treasure Hunter*, another pair of idiosyncratic American indie filmmakers – David and Nathan Zellner – use an urban legend surrounding the film as the launchpad for their third feature.

Their Kumiko (a sad-eyed, sallow Rinko Kikuchi) is a fictionalised version of Takako Konishi, a Tokyo office worker who was found dead in a snowy Minnesota field in November 2001. Local media alleged that Konishi – hoodwinked by the film's bogus claim to be a true story – had perished while attempting to locate a suitcase of cash hidden by Steve Buscemi's character. While Paul Berczeller's *La Jetée*-esque short *This Is a True Story* (2003) explored the case in procedural detail, and ultimately debunked the *Fargo* link as mischievous tittle-tattle, the Zellners have cleaved to this tantalising myth. The result is a chilly, whimsical study of loneliness that can be also viewed as a sly critique of obsessive cinephilia: Kumiko's fearsomely driven investment in unpacking the mysteries behind a fictional film recalls the conspiratorial participants in *Room 237* (2012), Rodney Ascher's documentary on *The Shining* superfandom.

Though the precise nature of Kumiko's mental state remains ambiguous, the film paints a powerful portrait of a solitary, socially anxious and poignantly credulous soul. Unable to conjure enthusiasm for her dead-end job and frustrated by strict, socially encoded gender roles, she can it seems only really take refuge in the film, which here appears imbued with sinister, compulsive qualities. In the scenes depicting a transfixed Kumiko bathed in the harsh, glowing light spilling from her television, it's hard not to think of David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983) and Nakata Hideo's *Ring* (1998) and *Ring 2* (1999), all of which ruptured the communion between viewer and screen with notes of metaphysical horror. Elsewhere, Kumiko's isolation is accentuated by exquisite framing that repeatedly strands her



Treasure hunt: Rinko Kikuchi

alone in doorways, arches and between library shelves. An excellent score by The Octopus Project adds to the atmosphere, marrying skeletal electronics and Japanese instrumentation while subtly incorporating elements of Carter Burwell's clean, bright score for the Coens' original movie.

If the first portion of this neatly bifurcated film boasts a remarkably unsettling charge, the spell diffuses somewhat when Kumiko, armed with her boss's credit card, leaves Tokyo for the Minnesotan wilds. She meets a parade of mildly grotesque (and thus extremely *Fargo*-ish) characters, but her quest is so single-minded that the cross-cultural encounters have an airless, perfunctory quality. These sequences also play like a slightly poor relation to *Nebraska* (2013) by Alexander Payne (credited here as executive producer), a more complete work which also tracked the quixotic Midwestern quest of a troubled figure hoping to collect a nonexistent fortune.

That said, the Zellners' evident gift for crafting slivers of haunting imagery – like Kumiko's makeshift coat, fashioned from a motel quilt, dragging forlornly in the dirty snow – never fully deserts them, and Kumiko is a genuinely compelling figure. Kikuchi has little to say, or even do, but infuses the role with steely determination and a palpable ache. She even brings pathos to the audacious denouement, which cleverly closes the loop on the surreal opening sequence, and suggests that the filmmakers share more than a little of their subject's fondness for the fantastical. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Nathan Zellner
Cameron Lamb
Chris Ohlson
Andrew Banks
Jim Burke
Written by
David Zellner
Nathan Zellner

Director of Photography

Sean Porter

Edited by

Melba Jodorowsky

Production Designers

Japan Unit:
Kiku Ota
US Unit:
Chad Keith

Music

The Octopus Project

Sound

Mixer, Japan Unit:

Ryotaro Harada

Recordist, US Unit:

Jim Morgan

Costume Designers

Japan Unit:
Tony Crosbie
US Unit:
Kiersten Ronning

Jim Morgan

Executive Producers

Alexander Payne
Jim Taylor
Rinko Kikuchi

Film Extracts

Fargo (1995)

A Zellner Bros film

Executive Producers

Nathan Zellner
Robert

Brad Pather

Brad

Shirley Venard

old woman

David Zellner

Deputy Caldwell

Sakagami

Kanako Higashi

Michi

Yumiko Hioki

Rinko's mother

Nathan Zellner

Robert

Brad Pather

Brad

Shirley Venard

old woman

David Zellner

Deputy Caldwell

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Soda Pictures

Kumiko, the 1990s. An agent from the Kingsman secret service gives his life to save colleague Harry Hart.

Seventeen years later, Hart repays the debt by rescuing the dead agent's delinquent twentysomething son Gary 'Eggsy' Unwin from police custody in London and offering him the chance to compete with other candidates for a vacancy at the Kingsman agency. Hart is investigating multibillionaire telecommunications entrepreneur Raymond Valentine, who plots – with the connivance of international politicians – to forestall overpopulation and ecological disaster via a phone-chip signal that will make humans turn murderously on one another.

Eggsy passes most of the trial stages to become an agent but fails at the final hurdle, when he refuses an order to shoot his pet dog. Acrophobic Roxy becomes the next Kingsman agent. While following a lead in America, Hart is exposed to an experimental burst of Valentine's signal, and kills a bigoted church congregation. Confused by his own actions, Hart confronts Valentine outside the church, and is shot dead. After outwitting Arthur, the Kingsman chief (who has secretly gone over to Valentine's side), Eggsy rushes to Valentine's arctic base. While Roxy takes out the signal-emitting satellite, Eggsy fights Valentine's men and his blade-legged henchwoman Gazelle. Kingsman's new chief Merlin causes circuits implanted in the heads of the armed guards and the complicit politicians to explode. Eggsy kills Valentine.

Tokyo, present day. Twenty-nine-year-old office worker Kumiko repeatedly watches a VHS of the Coen brothers' 1996 film *Fargo*, and takes meticulous notes on the scene in which Steve Buscemi's character, Carl Showalter, buries a suitcase full of money in the Minnesotan snow. Kumiko steals her boss's credit card and, armed with a homemade treasure map, flies to Minnesota with the intention of finding the money. An elderly woman gives Kumiko a place to stay but Kumiko leaves when the woman refuses to help her head north to *Fargo*. A policeman also tries to help but Kumiko reacts furiously to his suggestion that the money doesn't exist because the film – which claimed to be based on a true story – is pure fabrication. Kumiko wanders alone in increasingly unforgiving conditions. In what may be a hallucination, she finds the money and reunites with her pet rabbit, which she had earlier abandoned in Tokyo.

Life of Riley

France 2013

Director: Alain Resnais

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Life of Riley, Alain Resnais' final movie, which premiered at the 2014 Berlin Film Festival three weeks before its director's death, ends with a funeral. I am not inclined to chalk this up to any particular foresight on the part of Resnais – he was 91 years old, and you have to imagine that for the past couple of decades he'd known that the next one might be the last. *You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet* (2012), for my money Resnais' best film of the 21st century, and also concerned with a theatre rehearsal overshadowed by death, would've made a sweeter swansong. As it is, *Riley* scarcely registered on its short theatrical run Stateside, while *Goodbye to Language* by Jean-Luc Godard – along with Agnès Varda and the reportedly failing Jacques Rivette, the last of the New Wavers standing – has been a critical *cause célèbre*.

It is only fitting, then, that *Life of Riley* takes place just outside the spotlight. Its scenes occur on the fringes of rehearsals for an amateur theatrical production that we never see performed or even fully understand the subject of. The title's Riley also goes unseen, though the rest of the dramatis personae can't stop talking about him; while they've all settled into middle-aged ruts, he's still a life-of-the-party guy who feasts on "the endless ebullience of youth", even with the shadow of death hanging over him. The youngest member of the *Life of Riley* cast – other than Alba Gaia Bellugi, who only appears in the final shot – is Sandrine Kiberlain, playing Riley's ex-wife Monica. She's in her mid-forties, while the ages of rest of the cast average out to a little over 60, something one doesn't often find in movies whose titles are not suffixed with *Exotic Marigold Hotel*.

The players are Sabine Azéma, Hippolyte Girardot, Caroline Silhol, Michel Vuillermoz and André Dussollier. With the exception of Kiberlain, they are all actors who have worked with Resnais in the past, many in the ensemble of *You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet*. Azéma, the director's wife, has appeared in his movies since the early 80s, usually as their worst feature – and while I agree with critic J. Hoberman's one-time typifying of Azéma as Resnais' "reliably irritating muse", there is something nevertheless touching in his dedication to his troupe of players.

Resnais has yet another old collaborator on *Life of Riley* in the playwright Alan Ayckbourn, on whose 74th stage piece the film is based. (The play-within-a-play, incidentally, is Ayckbourn's own 1965 *Relatively Speaking*.) Resnais has adapted Ayckbourn's work twice before, in 1993's *Smoking/No Smoking* and 2006's *Private Fears in Public Places*. Though working here with an entirely francophone cast, Resnais doesn't change the English setting of Ayckbourn's play. Indeed, the film begins with and periodically returns to views of the countryside around Yorkshire, though rather than hide his displacement of the material – from Britain to France, from stage to screen – Resnais prefers to play up this incongruity. The film's principal locations include the small fenced-in castle with crenellated walls that is George Riley's home; the yards of one couple's townhouse and another's baronial manor; and the farmhouse belonging to Simeon, the new partner of George's ex-wife. Each is introduced and reintroduced by hand-



Final act: Caroline Silhol, Michel Vuillermoz

drawn 'establishing shots' courtesy of the graphic novelist Blutch, then enters into live-action footage shot on sets designed to look like nothing other than something by Jacques Saulnier, Resnais' production designer since the days of *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), whose own passing late last year was little noted. These are proscenium-ready concoctions of fake shrubbery that change with the seasons, backed by painted curtains through which characters enter and exit. (There are no interiors until over an hour in.) Adding a further layer of complication to the film's sense of 'setting' are Resnais' periodic *coup de théâtre* close-ups in which characters, at moments of particularly crucial self-revealing dialogue, are suddenly jerked from one artifice to another, seen against a black-and-white crosshatched background.

While so many filmmakers, as with people in general perhaps, tend to grow bitter and crabbed with age, Resnais deserves to be celebrated as an exception – at least in theory. In practice, I confess that I find his late films irksome as or more often than I find them poignant, burdened by an over-insistent wistfulness pointed to here by the film's French title: *Aimer, boire et chanter*. Not helping matters is the contribution of Mark Snow, a TV composer with whom Resnais has bafflingly worked since *Private Fears in Public Places*, here stuck in Buoyant Whimsy mode. In the men of *Life of Riley*, insecure and overshadowed by George Riley's indefatigable joie de vivre, Resnais may be seen to justify the resolutely unspectacular subject matter of his later work. It is a movie of small, modest charms, speaking to the virtue of small, modest feelings. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Jean-Louis Livi

Screenplay

Laurent Herbiet

Dialogue

Alex Réval

Editor

Hervé de Luze

Art Director

Jacques Saulnier

Original Music

Mark Snow

Sound

Jean-Pierre Duret

Costume Designer

Gérard Hardy

Production Companies

Gérard Lamps

Production Companies

Solivagus

Production Companies

© comme Film,

Production Companies

France 2 Cinéma,

Production Companies

Colin

Production Companies

Michel Vuillermoz

Production Companies

Jack

Film, France 2

Cinéma, Solivagus

co-production

With the participation

of Canal+, Ciné-

France Télévisions,

Le Pacte, Centre

National du Cinéma

et de l'Image Animée

In association with

Manon 3, Cinéimage

8 and La Banque

Postale Image 6

With the support of

Procirep

Alba Gaia Bellugi

Tilly

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Eureka Entertainment

French theatrical title

Aimer, boire

et chanter

Cast

Sabine Azéma

Kathryn

Sandrine Kiberlain

Monica

Caroline Silhol

Tamara

André Dussollier

Simeon

Hippolyte Girardot

Colin

Michel Vuillermoz

Jack

Yorkshire, present day. A couple, Colin and Kathryn, run through their lines for an amateur play. Colin reveals that their mutual friend George Riley has been diagnosed with a fatal illness, and Kathryn leaks this news to their friends Tamara (who is also appearing in the play) and Jack. When a fourth actor drops out of the production, they decide to recruit George in his stead. Months of rehearsals pass, and Kathryn and Tamara begin to be drawn anew into the orbit of George – who is never seen on screen or heard from – as is his estranged wife Monica, who now lives with a farmer named Simeon. The women take turns waiting on George, together cleaning up his house, which has fallen into bachelor disrepair, but discord strikes when they discover that he has asked each of them individually to go on holiday in the Canaries with him. On the eve of the final performance, Kathryn, Tamara and Monica are all planning to leave the following day with George, but the women's respective men, who have variously neglected their partners, are pushed to plead with them for forgiveness. The women decide not to go. George runs off with Jack and Tamara's 16-year-old daughter Tilly. He dies while scuba diving. George's friends gather for his funeral, and once they've left, Tilly emerges from the wings to place a photograph on his coffin.

Love Is All

United Kingdom 2014
Director: Kim Longinotto

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Eschewing any cutting-edge arguments about its subject, *Love Is All* aims to be a brief affirmation that love and courtship are – and always have been – more complex and inclusive than organised religion, government health departments or Disney princesses might have led us to believe. Assembled from a variety of narrative, documentary and home-movie footage culled from the BFI, Yorkshire Film, National Fairground and North East Film archives, Kim Longinotto's expansive, unapologetically feminist definition of that special feeling unfolds roughly chronologically, beginning with a snippet from 1898 of a kiss in a train car going through a tunnel.

As that slightly Freudian example suggests, the sources Longinotto draws from are always ahead of their time, though some more explicitly so than others. Longinotto highlights these progressive examples by condensing their narratives or allowing their dialogue to play over the soundtrack, such as with Maurice Elvey's 1927 film *Hindle Wakes* (in which a female textile worker rejects a marriage proposal from the factory owner's son), the 1929 Anna May Wong vehicle *Piccadilly* (the Chinese protagonist is desired by her white club manager) or 1965's *Dream A40* (a man explores his homoerotic feelings). Filling the gaps between these larger sections are snippets of female wrestlers (*Hints to the Ladies on Jiu-Jitsu*), cautionary tales about prostitution and STDs (*Any Evening After Work*), weddings both staged (*Isn't It a Lovely Day*) and real (*Marriage of Miss Rose Carmel & Mr Solly Gerschowit*) and post-war city nightlife (*Momma Don't Allow*, co-directed by Tony Richardson and Karel Reisz). None of the films included is edited in a way that manufactures an enlightened view; history is still sometimes ugly or unfortunate, although a few retrograde films are kept in for laughs.

As the film progresses, Longinotto's selections emphasise how much more racially diverse the UK has become over the past 100 years, particularly with the inclusion of lengthy sections of Horace Ové's *Pressure* (1976), Steven Frears's *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and Sarah Gavron's *Brick Lane* (2007). In the final stretch, the film reaches a crescendo with a gay marriage ceremony recorded by the Telegraph online, and concludes with a section that pairs

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Mark Atkin
Heather Croall
Martin Rosenbaum
Edited by
Ollie Huddleston
Music
Richard Hawley

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Film Institute/
Crossover Labs Ltd
Production

Companies

BFI presents in
association with BBC
a Crossover/Lone
Star production
in association
with the British
Film Institute and
Sheffield Doc/
Fest for BBC
Made with the
support of the
BFI's Film Fund

Supported by
BBC North

In Colour
[1.78:1] and [1.34:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof

A documentary composed of found footage from films from a variety of national and regional archives showing how love and courtship have changed in the UK over the past 100 years.



Love springs eternal: *Love Is All*

previously viewed, old (all-white, heterosexual) romantic clips with the more recent (mixed-race and homosexual) ones. Though the more cynical viewer might be tempted to apply Aidan Burley's "multicultural crap" epithet to this finale or to the documentary as a whole, it's important to remember that showing how any other 'serious' subject (say, manufacturing in Britain) has changed over the same period of time through found footage would also adopt a contrast-heavy structure, all the while working towards a similar conclusion in terms of cultural representations and demographics.

Love Is All's laissez-faire feel is underpinned by former Pulp member Richard Hawley's music. However, unlike Jarvis Cocker and Martin Wallace's *The Big Melt* (also commissioned by Crossover Music Archive), some of the music here is from Hawley's back catalogue, not specially created for the film, and while the lyrics and tone of the pieces generally fit the action, there are no transitions between songs, diminishing the cohesiveness of the whole. (Though the clips only occasionally illustrate a particular lyric, certain sections have more of a 'music video' quality than is desirable.) Still, Hawley's music – however much it may edge into a poor man's version of Tindersticks – is infinitely preferable to the sort of tacky, tinkly music that attempts to approximate musical accompaniment for silent films.

Regardless of how appealing Hawley's brand of pop music is to any particular listener, it provides another method of recontextualising the footage that goes beyond any comparative cutting, helping to make the images more accessible to a broad, contemporary audience. Although it's easy to see *Love Is All* as a departure from the advocacy (of activists and causes) in Longinotto's previous films (*Pink Saris*, *The Day I Will Never Forget*, *Rough Aunties*), it exposes a larger public to a great deal of rare materials that are otherwise only accessible to academics or researchers. It's a tough call to say which is more powerful: love or knowledge. **S**

Love Is Strange

USA/Greece/Brazil 2014
Director: Ira Sachs
Certificate 15 94m 29s

See Feature
on page 40

Reviewed by Roger Clarke

Writer-director Ira Sachs continues his semi-autobiographical streak after the career highlight of *Keep the Lights On* (2012). *Love Is Strange* is a perfectly poised 90-minute portrait of an ageing gay couple who find themselves not so much thrown out of their own apartment as thrown out of their own lives. Unlike the drug-addled obsessions of *Keep the Lights On*, however, this is a film you could take your grandparents to see, in the nicest possible sense of that proposition.

Ben (John Lithgow) and George (Alfred Molina) are a couple who have been together for decades. At the beginning of the film they get married, and it's a communal and celebratory Manhattan affair: the reception at their modest apartment is full of love, with friends and family telling them what an inspiration they are. But because of this public declaration, George finds that he has fallen foul of his conditions of employment at the conservative Catholic college where he is a music teacher, and is summarily sacked. He and Ben can no longer afford to live where they do. They sell up, get almost nothing in cash terms, and have to stay with different households. There then follows a painful portrait of Ben living with his nephew and family, and George perching in the apartment of some gay cop neighbours, whose late-night socialising means he can't go to bed on the couch. Forlorn telephone conversations follow. "Sometimes when you live with people you know them better than you care to," observes Ben.

Lithgow and Molina have known each other for years, and fall easily into a sense of advanced brotherliness that is entirely convincing. But this is really Lithgow's film and we dwell most in his company; his Ben is a penniless artist (apparently based on someone known to Sachs) with a good heart, albeit one riddled with cardiovascular disease. His gentle mentoring of Joey, the teenager he is obliged to share a room with, is one of the film's focus points; the boy is played by Charlie Tahan, who was Zac Efron's ghostly brother in *Charlie St Cloud* (2010) and, more amusingly, Victor in *Frankenweenie* (2012). Joey is a grumpy teen who can spout a touch of unthinking homophobia – he hates Ben occupying his room; and he disapproves when Ben, returning to art as an escape and as an affirmation of who he is, paints a portrait of his friend Vlad on the roof.

The film's colours are warm and summery, and the music plays a central part, from the Chopin piano at the start to the lessons conducted by George: one very precise scene in which he teaches a little girl seems to unlock his own voice – in voiceover he reads a letter about tolerance to the parents of the school. The editing is crisp and spare without being brutal, and serves best purpose, removing a whole skein of unnecessary detail without harming the emotional core of the story.

Interestingly, Sachs has talked about this film as a kind of comedy, and there are gently funny scenes, such as when the couple pretend to be Stonewall veterans and get free drinks in a bar; there's a deft cinephile mix of the personal and a tribute to 1940s 'married then separated' movies such as *The Philadelphia Story*. Sachs has also talked



A separation: Alfred Molina, John Lithgow

of it as a film about education "with a small 'e'". That seems most evident in the ultimately benign and helpful effect Ben has on George. Sachs, who has recently married his long-term partner and lives in Manhattan, has based some of the film on real-life characters – the gay cops, for example – and real places he has recently got to know, such as the city's small public parks.

There are so many good things about this film. It's a Manhattan romance. It's a love letter to the

rapidly vanishing bohemian and artistic milieu of New York, now priced out of town. It's a wise description of the 'make your own family' culture of some modern lives. It's a gentle anatomy of the horrors of overstaying your welcome, of being poor, sick and old. And it's simply one of the best films about a long-term gay relationship ever made. Most of all it's a film about love – love that's a little frayed around the edges sometimes but straightforward, funny and true. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Lucas Joaquin
Lars Knudsen
Jay Van Hoy
Ira Sachs
Jayne Baron Sherman
Written by
Ira Sachs
Mauricio Zacharias
Director of Photography
Christos Voudouris
Edited by
Alfonso Gonçalves
Michael Taylor
Production Designer

Amy Williams
Sound Mixer
Dan Bricker
Costume Designer
Arjun Bhavin
©Love Is Strange, LLC
Production Companies
Parts & Labor presents in association with Faliro House Productions, Film 50, Mutressa Movies, RT Features an Ira Sachs film

Production supported by a Fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation
Produced in association with the San Francisco Film Society/Kenneth Rainin Foundation
Filmed with the support of the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development

Executive Producers
Blythe Robertson
Ali Beti
Abraham Brown
Marcy Feller
Gabby Hanna
Christos V.
Konstantakopoulos
Jim A. Lande
Elika Portnoy
Lourenço Sant'Anna
Jim Stephens
Rodrigo Teixeira
Laura Teodosio
Cast
Alfred Molina
George
John Lithgow
Ben
Darren Burrows
Elliot
Charlie Tahan
Joey
Cheyenne Jackson
Ted
Manny Perez
Roberto
Marisa Tomei
Kate

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Distributor
Altitude Film Distribution

New York, present day. After nearly 30 years together, gay couple Ben and George take advantage of new laws and marry. Returning from honeymoon, however, George is sacked by the Catholic school where he has been working as musical director. Unable to afford the mortgage on their apartment, Ben and George are forced to sell. George moves in with his neighbours, two gay police officers, while Ben stays with his nephew Elliot, Elliot's wife Kate and teenage son Joey. Separated, both men are miserable.

George is kept up all night by the party lifestyle of his hosts. Ben – an artist whose health is clearly failing – has to share a room with a resentful Joey. Kate, a writer used to working at home on her own, finds the arrival of a beloved but querulous relative extremely taxing. Ben escapes to paint on the roof but a fall down the stairs reveals a heart problem. He dies just as George meets a young man who offers them his rent-protected apartment. Sad and regretful, Charlie visits George in the new apartment.

Maidan

The Netherlands/Poland 2014
Director: Sergei Loznitsa

See Feature on page 26

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

It was a relatively inconsequential but striking detail of the protests, vigils and violence that occurred in Kiev's Independence Square in the

winter of 2013 that the news footage broadcast from the scene tended to be so eerily beautiful. Billows of smoke and steam, frosted trees and huddled, shifting crowds, all weirdly illuminated through scatterings of snow by floodlights and fires and camera flashes – the whole setting had a glamour to it that was seductive but also off-putting because its seductiveness seemed inappropriate. It was too pretty, too theatrical, as if it was being played out on a gallery wall.

Sergei Loznitsa's chronicle of the events that transpired in the square between November 2013 and February 2014 catches and holds this unnerving gorgeousness in a succession of long master shots, almost entirely from fixed positions, which frequently resemble painted canvases: not only heraldic and celebratory images of flag-festooned rallies and battlefields but also smokier, stranger, more abstract evocations of massed people and conflicts and, less predictably perhaps, cheerfully teeming market scenes like those of Bruegel the Elder. One of this film's many intriguing aspects is the emphasis it places on the continuation of ordinary, busy, trivial life in the midst of a crisis – as well as the adrenalised, carnival atmosphere that can accompany one. Independence Square (in Ukrainian it's called *Maidan Nezalezhnosti*, but the single word *Maidan* became shorthand for the anti-government protest movement) holds, in these shots, not only impassioned protesters but passers-by taking selfies, volunteers preparing and distributing food, people laughing, organising, arguing, making phone calls.

The detail – as in a canvas by Bruegel, or his predecessor Hieronymus Bosch – is funny and poignant and grossly human. In one sequence, a worker preparing sandwiches is caught with his sterile gloves off, making a mobile phone call; we see his supervisor gently admonish him and confiscate his phone as he protests, eyes pained and wide above his hygienic mask. Later, when matters between police and protesters have turned bloody, a line of people are seen matter of factly amassing piles of bricks as ammunition; in the midst of this labour, two women fall into a fierce, finger-jabbing argument. We can't hear what they're saying to each other, since this minor bustle, like the rest of the film, is presented without voiceover, soundtracked with the amplified declamations from the stage – song, speechmaking, bluster and bits of housekeeping in the first phase of the protests; instructions on crowd movement and medical treatment once bullets, tear gas and water cannon have come into play later on. But what's emphasised by the inclusion of such characterful footnotes is the number of levels on which we live: as microscopic, anonymous elements of vast historical narratives; as members of symbolic constructs such as nations, resistance movements and 'sides' of a conflict; as private individuals moving through our own entirely subjective and enclosed dramas; and as





Squaring up: Maidan

◀ social creatures in continual physical and emotional negotiation with others.

By depicting these various conditions of existence in parallel, Loznitsa's film is also able to inhabit several diverse functions simultaneously. It is a dispassionate, close-range journalistic account of a succession of events, but also a delicate, even whimsical portrait of small-scale

human interactions; it's a document of specific incidents, but also a timeless evocation of human reactions, both large and small, to crisis conditions. Among the speakers who address the crowds are poets whose material favours blood-and-sand bombast – "We shall overcome the old regime as heaven overcomes hell... Our long-suffering motherland: for her we live, for her we die." The far more subtle and affecting poetry in the film is to be found in its quietly busy corners.

Loznitsa, with cinematographers Serhiy Stefan Stetsenko and Mykhailo Yelchev, positions the camera at the periphery of the square for the most part, sometimes filming the stage directly, sometimes concentrating on the wider mass of spectators and at one point observing people watching the protests on a large screen. The camera moves only when it finds itself in an area under fire with tear gas; thereafter, its positioning appears to shift to an upstairs window, looking down on the smoky commotion. Very occasional intertitles provide information on the wider political context affecting the Maidan activity, and for the most part the people passing the camera do not acknowledge or interact with it, though at one stage a busker plays it the Ukrainian national anthem.

Films composed with this degree of formal rigour often seem to present a deliberate challenge to their viewers' fortitude. *Maidan*, however, is never dull; too rich is what it shows us, too troubling and fascinating the contrasts between the hyperbole from the stage, the individual reactions visible within the crowd and the invisible machinations of wider world politics that we know to be encroaching from the outside. The languid pacing of the shots emphasises the slow progress of events, and allows time for the viewer to absorb the odd shifts in atmosphere and the ongoing sense of uncertainty that accompanies them. And that troubling beauty never lets up. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Sergei Loznitsa
Maria Choustova-Baker
Directors of Photography
Sergei Loznitsa
Serhiy Stefan Stetsenko
Mykhailo Yelchev
Editors

Danielius Kokanauskis Sergei Loznitsa

Sound Recordists
Boris Peter Kirill Krasovskiy
In Colour
©Atoms & Void
Production Companies
Atoms & Void

Supported by Netherlands Film Fund, Against Gravity

Distributor
Dogwoof
Subtitles

A documentary about the anti-government protests in Ukraine in 2013 and 2014. Footage shows crowds massing in Kiev's Independence Square in November 2013 to protest at the refusal by President Viktor Yanukovich's government to sign the Ukraine-Europe Union Association Agreement. The protesters make banners, prepare food and sleep in makeshift camps. The Ukrainian national anthem is sung. Speeches are made decrying the government and its close ties to Vladimir Putin's Russia, and promising its overthrow. The crowds are addressed by priests, poets, activists and a children's choir in national dress. An intertitle notes that in January 2014 new laws against public gatherings were introduced. Riot police move in. Water cannon and tear gas are used against the protesters, who respond with bricks and stones. An operating theatre is set up in Kiev city hall to treat the injured. Floral tributes to the dead are left in the square.

A final intertitle states that 100 protesters were killed, more than 100 were injured and more than 100 remain missing. President Yanukovich fled Ukraine on 22 February.

Mortdecai

USA 2015
Director: David Koepp
Certificate 12A 106m 34s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

The case for updating Cyril Bonfiglioli's brilliant Mortdecai novels, published and set in the 1970s, is slender enough, and it is barely gestured towards by this feeble adaptation. The film's problems begin but do not end with Johnny Depp's performance in the title role, which would be grating regardless of its fidelity to the literary original. And given that the film borrows numerous elements – characters, setting, plot, dialogue and voiceover narration – from the novels, the question of fidelity does arise. If these elements are going to be tampered with, some structuring intelligence is needed to make sure that they are tampered with well, and that the other elements are tampered with in complementary fashion.

Depp, now 51, is numerically the right age, but nowhere near fat or drink-ravaged enough; and whereas Bonfiglioli's Mortdecai was an upper-class rogue, Depp plays him as an upper-class twit a little like Terry-Thomas and a lot like Paul Whitehouse's "with my reputation?" character from *The Fast Show*. (Whitehouse himself appears in a somewhat Stavros-esque cameo.) To all of which Depp is entitled as producer, but it does produce knock-on problems. Bonfiglioli's Mortdecai belonged to a time before his own, but only slightly, and, crucially, he had the ruling-class knack for adaptation. He was a complete snob, yet easily conversant with the lower orders. Depp's version, plonked down in the 2010s, is a total anachronism, but no one seems to have decided how he got there, nor indeed how to represent 'the 2010s'.

The Mortdecai of the novels lived in Mayfair, but in his line of work had dealings with various shady characters in then remote Shoreditch. The much reported-on evacuation of the West End by the old elite, and the colonisation of the East by the new, presents opportunities that are simply not taken. This Mortdecai has been removed from his habitat – the grubby, incompletely modernised London of four or five decades ago – and placed in front of a nondescript simulacrum with which he barely interacts (and no, there isn't a satirical subtext here). Gone with the grime of the original setting is the nastiness of the stories: Mortdecai, ex-special forces in the books, and not to be trifled with, is a mere buffoon here,



The artful dodger: Johnny Depp

No Manifesto

USA 2014
Director: Elizabeth Marcus
Certificate 15 115m 45s

and his antagonist Martland (Ewan McGregor) is now a bland MI5 man rather than a torturer.

In this version, Mortdecai and Martland went to the same university rather than the same school, the reason for which apparently trivial change becomes clear only later when it sets up a cheap gag involving Martland's having gone to Eton (where he would have been buggered, goes the joke, unlike Mortdecai). That Mortdecai and Martland went to the same "second-rate" public school, "long on sodomy and things but a bit short on the straight bat, honour and other expensive extras", is not, however, some irrelevant detail that can be thrown out, but central to Bonfiglioli's whole conception. The commercially motivated travesty is the oldest story in screenwriting; here the sacrifice has been in vain. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Andrew Lazar
Johnny Depp
Christi Dembrowski
Patrick McCormick
Screenplay
Eric Aronson
Based on the novel entitled *Don't Point That Thing at Me* by Kyrril Bonfiglioli

Director of Photography
Florian Hoffmeister

Edited by
Jill Savitt

Derek Ambrosi

Production Designer

James Merifield
Music

Geoff Zanelli
Mark Ronson

Production Sound Mixer

Tony Dawe

Costume Designer

Ruth Myers

©Lions Gate Films Inc. and Odd Lot Pictures, LLC.
Production

Companies

Lionsgate and OddLot Entertainment present an Infinitum Nihil/Mad Chance/Lionsgate production
Executive Producer
Gigi Pritzker

Cast

Johnny Depp
Charlie Mortdecai
Gwyneth Paltrow
Johanna Mortdecai
Ewan McGregor
Inspector Martland
Olivia Munn
Georgina Krampf
Jeff Goldblum
Krampf
Paul Bettany
Jock Strapp
Jonny Pasvolsky
Emil
Guy Burnet
Maurice
Ulrich Thomsen
Romanov
Michael Culkin
Sir Graham Archer
Michael Byrne

Following the murder of art conservator Bronwen and the theft from her home of a lost Goya, on the back of which is written the number of Hermann Goering's Swiss bank account, MI5 recruits art dealer Charlie Mortdecai to find the painting before it falls into the hands of terrorist financier Strago. Mortdecai's contact Spinoza, a mechanic who is preparing Mortdecai's Rolls-Royce for sale to American art collector Krampf, is shot dead. Another contact reports Mortdecai's doings to a Russian gangster who is also on the painting's trail, whereupon Mortdecai is abducted to Moscow. Meanwhile Mortdecai's wife Johanna follows up more useful clues.

Having escaped, Mortdecai is sent by MI5 to Los Angeles to investigate Krampf while selling his car. It transpires that Krampf arranged with Spinoza to smuggle the painting into the US inside Mortdecai's Rolls, and also that Krampf's daughter Georgina is in cahoots with Strago. Both of them are caught. The painting proves to be a fake. Johanna deduces that the real one is in the possession of Bronwen's lover, whose friend took it from Goering in 1945. The Mortdecais scheme to sell it for their own benefit without MI5 catching on. It is auctioned with only the main bidders knowing the painting's identity. The Mortdecais manage to push the bidding up to £30 million before the Russian buys it, and so are able to pay off their back taxes. It is revealed that the painting they sold is also a fake.

Reviewed by Sam Davies

The joke in the title of Elizabeth Marcus's debut film about Welsh group Manic Street Preachers is that although they never published a manifesto, they did everything but. Or rather, as *No Manifesto* makes enjoyably and abundantly clear, they didn't need to. Early on they were a kind of eight-legged manifesto in white denim, leopard print and eyeliner, firing out slogans, quotations and decrees at all available opportunities. The liner notes for their 1992 debut album *Generation Terrorists* quoted noted 'manifestoists' such as Marinetti, Valerie Solanas and Raoul Vaneigem. And also, for good measure, Nik Cohn, Henry Miller, William Burroughs, e.e. cummings, Rimbaud, Nietzsche, Camus, Plath, Confucius, Larkin, Ibsen and Chuck D.

As the band tell Marcus, their ambition was to make the biggest debut album of all time (16 million copies was the target) and then split up. As it turned out, 'the Sex Pistols with four library cards' wasn't quite the right route to pop's summit. But they continued, despite the disappearance in 1995 of guitarist and lyricist Richey Edwards, shortly after the release of their profoundly bleak third album, *The Holy Bible*. And as a trio, Nicky Wire (bass and lyrics) and cousins James Dean Bradfield (guitar and vocals) and Sean Moore (drums) came close to world domination (minus America) around the millennium, cleaning up at award shows and selling out vast stadiums.

No Manifesto took Marcus 12 years to make, presumably due to funding issues. At points this creates a slightly uneven tone with regards to time. The band members are seen reflecting on their career and legacy in the mid-2000s, and doing so again years later. A number of scenes follow the band working on 2007's *Send Away the Tigers*, and you can detect the outline of a discarded draft of the film in which this album would be the framing device: can they reclaim their crowns after a couple of misfiring albums? But this 12-year gestation in the end becomes a strength of *No Manifesto*, giving it *Seven Up*-style grace notes as Marcus's camera captures the Manics gradually ageing. It also means Marcus has for a subject a band that's about as

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Kurt Engfehr
Directors of Photography

Chuck Miller

Mike Desjarlais

Editor

Kurt Engfehr

Field Audio

Chuck Miller

©Polywog

Travesty LLC

Production

Companies

A Polywog
Travesty film

A film by Elizabeth

Marcus with Manic

Street Preachers

Executive Producer

Joe Cross

Film Extracts

Stardust Memories

(1980)

The Proud

Valley (1940)

Rumble Fish (1983)

The Apartment (1960)

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor

November Films

UK publicity title

No Manifesto: A Film about Manic Street Preachers

A documentary tracing the career of Welsh group Manic Street Preachers from their formation in 1986 to the present day. Made over 12 years, the film combines live footage, archival TV appearances and extensive interviews with the group, as well as numerous clips of fans discussing the Manics' music, personalities and significance.



Rock of ages: Nicky Wire

old as its members were when they started it.

Ageing inevitably introduces questions of compromise. "You can't go through life without contradicting yourself, it's impossible," says Bradfield at one point, calling to mind an earlier clip of Edwards stating, "It's all about hypocrisy." And there have always been contradictions at the heart of the Manics' discography. The lyrics are a holy bibliography of radical politics and literature, but the music largely runs the gamut from anthemic punk to anthemic heavy rock, as if their record collections extend little further than The Clash, Guns N' Roses and Echo & The Bunnymen.

That feeling of a group torn between the idea of the avant-garde and the comforts of more solid (or stolid) fare is repeated in Marcus's approach. Rather than shake up or question any documentary conventions, *No Manifesto* plays it straight: lots of group interviews, live and archival clips, and attempts to capture candid moments backstage and in the studio, all organised in mostly chronological order. The Manics' magpie eye for a quote is echoed in the use of onscreen epigrams. One documentary standard that Marcus does leave out is the expert witness. None of the journalists who championed the group in the press appear; instead Marcus cuts out such middlemen, preferring to give the fans a voice – dozens of them appear throughout the film to share their feelings about the band. It's an admirable gesture but doesn't quite pay off, with few of the fans' comments rising above the bland or glib.

The contrast with Wire's apparent inability to stop speaking in press-ready quotes is stark. "I'm not trying to sound fucking intelligent," he says of his lyrics in one live clip, "I am fucking intelligent." Wire's combination of self-deprecation and rock-star conviction is hard to resist: "I don't think everyone who heard us went out and started a band," he says at one point, alluding to a famous line about The Velvet Underground. "They all seem to have gone into education." ☀

PK

India 2014
Director: Rajkumar Hirani
Certificate 12A 152m 19s

Reviewed by Naman Ramachandran

Rajkumar Hirani has found a winning formula for making blockbuster Bollywood films. He fashions simple (bordering on simplistic) homespun stories focusing on India's social problems and creates heartwarming films that appeal to the masses and intelligentsia alike, while delivering powerful messages. Hirani's directorial debut *Munna Bhai MBBS* (2003) trained its guns on the Indian hospital system; its sequel, *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (2006), espoused Gandhian values to solve societal ills; and *3 Idiots* (2009) was a benign exposé of the malaise in the Indian higher education system. With *PK*, Hirani expands his horizons and tackles that most sensitive of subjects – religion.

As in his previous films, Hirani employs an outsider to look at deeply entrenched practices. The titular *PK* is the ultimate outsider, an alien from many galaxies away who has no malign agenda on earth but is simply here on a fact-finding mission. In Hollywood films, aliens usually land in America and the rest of the world barely exists; here, only India exists for *PK*, with a brief telepathic sortie to Belgium.

He has barely touched down in India when his pendant – his only means of communicating with his ship – is stolen, and like ET he immediately wants to go home. When every earthling he turns to for help tells him that God is his last resort, *PK* takes this literally and goes on a quest for the Almighty, becoming disillusioned in the process. In this part of the film, Hirani takes no prisoners and exposes some questionable practices in the name of religion, looking mainly at Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism and Islam. On its own, this coruscating passage is virtuoso cinema, but its effect is diluted in the overall context of the film elsewhere because of Hirani's tendency to dumb down gags that work perfectly well without exposition. For example, when *PK* is caught with his hands in a temple till, he avoids getting slapped by sticking pictures of gods on his cheeks – but the joke is ruined when *PK* spells out his actions in words, on the off-chance that there's

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Vidhu Vinod Chopra
Rajkumar Hirani
Story/Screenplay/Dialogue
Abhijat Joshi
Rajkumar Hirani
Director of Photography
C.K. Murleedharan

Edited by
Rajkumar Hirani
Production Design
Rajnish Heda
Sumit Basu
Snigdha Basu
Music
Shantanu Moitra
Ajay-Atul
Production

Sound Mixing
Nihar Ranjan Samal
Costume Design
Manoshi Nath
Rushi Sharma
Production Companies
Vinod Chopra Films & Rajkumar Hirani

Films in association with UTV Motion Pictures present a Rajkumar Hirani film
Executive Producer
Sanjiv Kishinchandani

Cast
Aamir Khan
PK
Anushka Sharma
Jagat 'Jaggu'
Janani Sahnii
Sushant Singh Rajput
Sarfraz Yousuf
Sanjay Dutt

Bhairon Singh
Saurabh Shukla
Tapasvi Maharaj
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles
Distributor
UTV/IG Interactive

Rajasthan, India, the present. A spaceship touches down and an alien in human form emerges from it. Before he can get his bearings, a local snatches away his pendant, his sole means of communication with his spaceship.

A wide-eyed innocent, the alien wanders into the local village. When he asks seemingly stupid questions about mundane matters, the locals suggest that he is "peekay" (drunk, in Hindi) and soon he's known as *PK*. A local bandmaster befriends *PK* and sends him to Delhi, the biggest market for stolen goods, where his expensive-looking pendant is likely to show up. After being told by the police that only God can help him, *PK* does the rounds of Delhi temples, churches, mosques and gurdwaras seeking divine help. Jaggu, a rookie television reporter looking for a story, helps

him in his quest. *PK* chances on his pendant at a prayer meeting conducted by Tapasvi, a fraudulent Hindu guru who claims that *PK*'s property is in fact an ornament of Lord Shiva. With Jaggu's help, *PK* launches a televised India-wide movement that encourages people to dial in with instances of malpractices in the name of God, across religions. The movement becomes immensely popular, and Tapasvi is forced to agree to a television debate with *PK*, the winner getting the pendant. *PK* wins the debate and leaves for his home planet, nursing his unrequited love for Jaggu, who has reunited with her estranged Pakistani boyfriend.

Jaggu turns her experiences with the alien into a bestselling book. *PK* returns after some time, bringing others from his planet with him.



Spokesperson: Anushka Sharma, Aamir Khan

one person in the back row who didn't get it. And as in his previous work, Hirani lays on the 'why can't we all get along' sentiments with a trowel. Yet it all works, because Hirani's storytelling is sincere and devoid of cynicism, much like the dazzling, bug-eyed performance of his leading man, Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan.

In India, no good deed regarding religion goes unpunished, and cinemas showing *PK* were vandalised by rightwing political groups. The paying public had other ideas, however, and *PK* now takes its place alongside fellow Aamir Khan starrers *3 Idiots* and *Dhoom: 3* as one of the biggest grossers in the history of Indian cinema. ☀

Predestination

Australia/USA 2013
Directors: The Spierig Brothers
Certificate 15 97m 42s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

In Greek mythology, it is precisely Oedipus's attempts to avoid murdering his own father and marrying his own mother that drive him to fulfil that predicted fate. Yet in dramatising this clash of free will and determinism, the ancients had only the divine machinery of prophecy to fix the future of their narratives. Set in a more secular age, this film from Australian genre-loving brothers Michael and Peter Spierig (*Undead, Daybreakers*) concerns a 'temporal bureau' that uses privileged prescience to stop crimes (specifically terrorist bombings) before they can be committed; yet it replaces the oracles of ancient myth – and the 'precogs' of Steven Spielberg's similar *Minority Report* (2002) – with the speculative fiction of time travel, even if it is still exploring the same age-old questions of how much we are prisoners of our own biology and psychology, our genetic heritage and environmental circumstance. Here characters are constantly confronted with choices that have been massaged and manipulated earlier – often decades earlier – to ensure that only one outcome is possible. With one of its characters a true hermaphrodite, *Predestination* is as much concerned with issues of gender destiny as with the intertwined dynamics of terrorism and counterterrorism – but handles it all with a timely economy.

"See, you'll find out that time has a very different meaning for people like us," says the Bartender/Temporal Agent at the centre of *Predestination*. He is played by Ethan Hawke, star of *Daybreakers* and seasoned time-traveller (of a different kind) in Richard Linklater's long-game *Before... trilogy* (1995–2013) and *Boyhood* (2014). Time here works in a complicated manner, undermining conventional causality, confounding identities (professional, sexual, familial) and engendering a scenario that is, even for those viewers who imagine they know what is coming, remarkably singular. In keeping with these temporal convolutions, key events taking place in the 70s, 80s and 90s are all at once projected as a strange, not quite recognisable future ('All You Zombies', Robert Heinlein's short story from which this is faithfully expanded, was penned in 1958), and tinged with an alternative-reality nostalgia.

Criss-crossing multiple time periods, the film carefully elaborates an ingeniously looping paradox that "can't be paradoctored", as the



Time laps: Ethan Hawke

Shaun the Sheep The Movie

United Kingdom 2014
Directors: Mark Burton, Richard Starzak

world-weary Bartender and a loquacious young customer (Sarah Snook, astonishingly versatile) struggle to turn damaged pasts into bright futures and end up chasing their own tails. This is a noirish world full of tough bastards and sons of bitches – but it is also closed, almost solipsistic, with very few characters (“I don’t get out and meet a lot of new people,” as one of them puts it). The screenplay is tightly constructed, its hidden Sophoclean ironies best appreciated with more than one viewing. But for all the high-concept twists and turns, there are next to no special effects (the time machine, charmingly, looks like a violin case), as this remains very much a tragedy rooted in characters who must learn through suffering, face incestuous home truths and grapple heroically with the inevitable. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Directed by

The Spiers Brothers
[i.e., Peter Spiers
Michael Spiers]

Produced by

Paddy McDonald
Tim McGahan
Peter Spiers
Michael Spiers

Written by

The Spiers Brothers
Based on the short story *All You Zombies* by Robert A. Heinlein

Director of Photography

Ben Nott

Film Editor

Matt Villa

Production Designer

Matthew Putland

Music

Peter Spiers

Sound Recordist

Gretchen Thornburn
Costume Designer
Wendy Cork

©Predestination Holdings Pty Ltd,
Screen Australia,
Screen Queensland
Pty Ltd and Cutting

Edge Post Pty Ltd

Production Companies

A Stage 6 Films presentation
Screen Australia presents in association with

Screen Queensland's Blacklab Entertainment, Wolfhound Pictures production

A film by the Spiers brothers

Developed with the assistance of Film Victoria

Developed, financed and produced with the assistance of Screen Queensland in association with Screen Queensland's Professional Attachments Programme

A Blacklab Entertainment/Wolfhound Pictures production

Principal investor: Screen Australia Executive

Producers

Michael Burton
Gary Hamilton
Matt Kennedy

James M. Vernon

Cast

Ethan Hawke
barkeep, Temporal Agent

Sarah Snook
unmarried mother, Jane, ‘John’

Noah Taylor
Mr Robertson

Christopher Kirby
Mr Miles

Christopher Sommers
Mr Miller

Kuni Kashimoto
Dr Fujimoto

Dolby Digital/
Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Signature Entertainment

Armed with a time machine, an agent for the Temporal Bureau hopes to stop the elusive Fizzle Bomber before he can commit a massive terrorist attack on New York in 1975. Given a new face after his containment of an earlier bomb leaves him disfigured, the agent is sent back to New York in 1970, on his final mission. There, working undercover as a bartender, he listens to a younger man telling his hard-luck story. This man, born a woman, was abandoned as a baby at a Cleveland orphanage in 1945. Intelligent and aggressive, 18-year-old Jane was recruited in her teens to try out for a (fake) programme to provide female company for male astronauts. Impregnated and abandoned, she lost her female sex organs during a difficult childbirth and, learning that she was hermaphroditic, underwent surgery to become a man. Her baby girl was abducted from the nursery. Bitter, ‘John’ moved to New York.

The agent offers John the opportunity to confront his child’s abductor, in return for joining the Temporal Bureau. He takes John to 1963, where John meets, and falls for, the younger Jane. The agent abducts Jane’s baby in 1964 and leaves her at a Cleveland orphanage in 1945, before picking up John in 1963 and taking him from his beloved Jane to sign up at the Bureau in 1985 for a long agency career. The agent retires to 1971; realising that the Fizzle Bomber is his older self, he shoots him dead.

Reviewed by Nick Bradshaw

After the delights of Aardman’s human-led features *The Pirates! In an Adventure with Scientists!* (2012) and *Arthur Christmas* (2011), *Shaun the Sheep The Movie* reverts to the beastly business of Wallace and Gromit’s *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* (2005) and, most appositely, *Chicken Run* (2000), the company’s maiden feature and the least charismatically characterised. Co-written by Richard Goleszowski, a veteran of Aardman’s *Shaun the Sheep*, *Creature Comforts* and *Rex the Runt* TV series, with first-time feature directors Mark Burton (whose comedy writing stretches back to *Spitting Image* and *The Russ Abbot Show*) and Richard Starzak, it’s a film that wilfully ties at least two hooves behind its back in terms of forgoing dialogue for silent-comedy disciplines and forgoing character charm for... the heck of it, apparently. It’s an invidious comparison, but certainly Shaun the smart-arse sheep is no Gromit (he has the enterprise but none of the long-taxed faithfulness) and his myopic and mumbling farmer is no Wallace; he has neither words, nor facial expressivity, nor even any kind of motivation to inspire our passions. Between them also stands a sheepdog of little colour.

For pure comic hijinks, however, the movie is superb: quick-fire and richly cartoonish. The plot engine is an animals-in-the-big-city scenario in which sheep and sheepdog attempt to bring home their farmer – who has rolled sleeping into town in a runaway caravan and lost his memory – while dodging the offices of a vainglorious animal catcher.

As with Nick Park’s Wallace and Gromit shorts, there’s a certain postmodern purity to the storyline’s appropriation of stock types and twists – the goaded officer driven to vendetta, the *A-Team*-like plan-knocking-together segue into the third act. But it’s the manifold bits of inspired comic business that are the treasures: sheep dressed up in pairs as pantomime humans in turtleneck jumpers and scarves, wandering around town like very cosy androids; the sheepdog in doctor’s scrubs expected to



Raging wool: *Shaun the Sheep The Movie*

perform invasive surgery; the sheep’s when-in-Rome copycat table manners in a posh French restaurant, ending with customers covered in everything from fish heads to fruit purée; the lovely shots resulting from the sheep’s Trojan-pantomime-horse getaway vehicle. The rhyming of the farmer, in his farm-splattered T-shirt and ragged drawstring trousers, with a trendy hairdresser sporting much the same (plus shears) is a delightful bit of urban satire and, sans verbal gags, one of the few opportunities for sheep-culture comedy; another involves an excellent ditty by a baabaashop quintet.

Which brings us to the otherwise terrible music: the film mires itself in several montages set to utterly foursquare and charmless pop and rap songs which should at least have been recommissioned, and preferably scrapped. These aside, *Shaun* has something of the quality of Jacques Tati’s *Jour de fête*: wonderful comic routines but nothing to inspire the heart. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Julie Lockhart
Paul Kewley

Written by

Mark Burton
Richard Starzak

Director of Photography

Charles Copping

Dave Alex Riddett

Edited by

Sim Evan-Jones

Production Designer

Matt Perry

Composer

Ilan Eshkeri

Sound Design

Adrian Rhodes

Animation Supervisor

Loyd Price

©Aardman

Animations Limited
and Studiocanal S.A.

Production Companies

Studiocanal presents

an Aardman

production

Executive Producers
Peter Lord
Nick Park

David Sproxton

Olivier Courson

Ronald Halpern

Voice Cast

Justin Fletcher

Shaun/Timmy

John Sparkes

the farmer/Bitzer

Omid Djalili

Trumper

Richard Webber

Shirley

Kate Harbour

Timmy’s mum/Meryl

Tim Hands

Slip

Andy Nyman

Nuts

Simon Greenhalgh

twin

Emma Tate

Hazel

In Colour

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

Aiming for a break from their rural routine, Shaun the sheep and his flock lull their farmer to sleep by making him count them as they jump fences. The farmer slumbers in his caravan but it careers down the hill and arrives in the city, pursued by the farm dog and the sheep. Concussed on arrival, the farmer wakes in hospital with memory loss; his dog disguises himself as a surgeon but is unmasked after he feasts on the bones of a model skeleton, following which he is impounded by an animal containment officer. The sheep evade the same officer by camouflaging themselves as humans, but Shaun’s disguise unravels in a French restaurant and he too ends up in the pound. Meanwhile the farmer has slipped out of hospital and found fame as a trendy barber called Mr X.

After an elaborate escape from the pound, the sheep are led by a friendly stray dog to the hairdresser’s, but the amnesiac farmer rejects them. They repeat their fence-jumping trick, abduct the sleeping farmer in a sheep-powered pantomime horse, hitch the caravan to a bus and return to the farm, with the animal catcher clinging on and trying to divert them into a nearby quarry. Shaun and the farm bull force him out of the fray as the farmer wakes up.

Snow in Paradise

United Kingdom/Switzerland/France/The Netherlands 2014
Director: Andrew Hulme
Certificate 18 107m 56s

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Watch individual scenes out of context and the heart plummets: does British cinema really need yet another hard-nut gangster movie to add to the gazillion produced since Guy Ritchie's late-1990s breakthrough? Especially when the narrative boils down to another would-be redemptive storyline about a man trying to break out of a vicious circle of drugs and criminality? Dave is (at least) a second-generation criminal, taking advantage of family connections to secure potentially lucrative jobs but making the double mistake of involving his best friend Tariq and skimming off his own supply of drugs from the top of a much larger delivery. So far, so ho-hum.

But *Snow in Paradise* turns out to have several points of more than passing interest. It's partly based on co-writer Martin Askew's own discovery of Islam while living as a smalltime East End gangster (Askew himself plays Dave's uncle Jimmy), and consequently offers a different take on Islam compared to the caricatured British tabloid version, with Amjad the imam (Ashley Chin) the film's most attentively sympathetic character by some distance. And newcomer Frederick Schmidt gives a very impressive performance as Dave, coping admirably with a visual treatment that not only features him in almost every shot but frequently shows him in tight close-up, often emphasising a facial blemish that looks like a tear being shed (not inappropriate, under the psychological circumstances).

Debutant director Andrew Hulme started out as an editor (*Gangster No. 1, Red Riding*) and his roots are betrayed by an overly ostentatious use of flashbacks and flashforwards. Visually, the film is very accomplished given the low budget (partly raised through online crowdfunding), with Mark Wolf's Scope-framed cinematography a particular asset, highlighting the contrast between Dave's uncontrolled life on the street and the mosque's naturally lit serenity.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Christine Alderson

Written by

Martin Askew

Director of Photography

Mark Wolf

Editor

Barry Moen

Production Designers

Alexandra Walker

Sophia Chowdhury

Composer

Kevin Pollard

Sound Recordist

Giancarlo Dellapina

Costume Designer

Ian Fulcher

©Snow in Paradise UK Limited

Production Companies

A film by Andrew Hulme

B Media Global

presents an Ispo Facto production

in association with

Millbrook Pictures, Snow in Paradise

UK, Gloucester

Place Films and Back Up Media

Developed in association with CineMart

Executive Producers

Jane Bristow

Roshanak Behesht

Nedjad

Paul De La Peña

Yasmine Askew

Thomas Sterchi

Lars Wiebe

Beat Arnold

Nigel Thomas

Charlotte Walls

Cast

Frederick Schmidt

Dave

Aymen Hamdouchi

Tariq

Martin Askew

Uncle Jimmy

Claire-Louise

Cordwell

Theresa

Ashley Chin

Amjad

David Spinx

Mickey Young

Joel Beckett

Kenny

Clive Brunt

Lee

Steve Nicolson

dealer

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Curzon Film World



East End promise: Frederick Schmidt

But none of these virtues counterbalances the script's shortcomings, with its elliptical thick-ear slang (Pinter this ain't), its overreliance on stereotypes – the whore with the heart of gold, the old-school gangster who believes in respect, his viciously amoral counterpart – and cameos such as the photographer caught turning Dave's natural habitat into an art project. The latter prompts a contemptuous Dave to launch into a tirade about the creative exploitation of poverty – a charge that could arguably just as easily be laid at the filmmakers.

In particular, Dave's conversion to Islam, while certainly unexpected, is ultimately too schematic. The notion that all he needs is a more benevolent set of rules to compensate for the dog-eat-dog ones he normally lives by means that the film largely fails to offer what could have been a far more complex and rewarding examination of why disaffected young men might wish to turn to Islam despite the overwhelmingly negative stereotyping by both the media and their immediate peer groups. Instead, Hulme relies too much on decidedly familiar set pieces as Dave gears up for a final showdown in an attempt to break free from his past. ☀

East London, the present. Dave takes best friend Tariq on 'a delivery' for Dave's uncle Jimmy, a local gangster. They drop off a holdall full of cocaine but Dave retains a packet and sells the contents in a nightclub. They meet 'Uncle Mickey' (Dave's late father's best friend), who asks them to work for him, giving them a down payment despite them saying no. A heavy suitcase is delivered to Dave's flat. Resisting the urge to open it, he obsessively carries it to and from his car before delivering it to the requested destination – a meat-packing plant. Tariq disappears, and Dave visits his mosque. The imam, Amjad, senses a troubled soul. Dave visits his prostitute girlfriend Theresa and looks after her son while she entertains clients. He visits Mickey, who offers him £10,000 to work for him. Returning to the mosque, Dave has a conversation about death and Islam, and has his prejudices challenged. Jimmy asks Dave to take a hammer to the man suspected of stealing the cocaine. After a full-blown breakdown, Dave returns to the mosque, where he is invited to stay, doing odd jobs and watching prayers. Jimmy tells Dave that Tariq was murdered by Mickey, and hands him a gun. Jimmy's henchmen drive Dave to Mickey's flat but Mickey tells him that Jimmy was responsible for the killing. Dave kills the henchmen, and Mickey then kills Jimmy. At the mosque, Dave whirls in a blissed-out trance.

The Snow Queen Magic of the Ice Mirror

Russian Federation 2014
Director: Aleksey Tsitsilin, Certificate U 78m 34s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

While it inevitably suffered in comparison to *Frozen*, which was also inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale, the 2012 Russian animation *The Snow Queen* was successful enough to merit a sequel with a high-profile English-language voice cast. Sharlto Copley affects a nasal English accent as protagonist Orm, a troll who lies his way into the troll king's palace and sets off on a quest to defeat the mysterious Snow King. While the story is an invention of four screenwriters, it tackles similar themes to *The Snow Queen*, including loyalty, friendship, morality and, most notably, deceit: Orm's tall tales have potentially catastrophic results.

Debut director Aleksey Tsitsilin delivers a few pleasing action set pieces and comical flourishes, but the animation itself is unexceptional and the plot too reliant on an unappealing central character. Orm is a self-serving hero whose repentance is too hurried, while his warmhearted human friend Gerda is sidelined.

Ultimately, it's an unremarkable sequel that concludes with a very heavy-handed effort to persuade children not to fib. ☀

The Snow Queen Magic of the Ice Mirror



Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Timur Bekmambetov

Produced by

Yuri Moskvin

Diana Yurinova

Screenplay

Aleksey Tsitsilin

Vladimir Nikolaev

Aleksey Zamyslov

Roman

Nepomnyashii

Director of Photography

Vladimir Nikolaev

Camera

Aleksey Tsitsilin

Film Editor

Aleksey Tsitsilin

Production Designers

Aleksey Zamyslov

Aleksey Lyamkin

Composer

Mark Willot

Sound Designer

Simon Gershon

Supervising

Technical Director

Aleksey Zamyslov

Production Companies

Wizart Animation,

Bazelevs, CF -

Cinema Fund Russia

Supported by

Cinema Fund

Executive Producer

Vladimir Nikolaev

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Signature

Entertainment

Russian

theatrical title

Snezhnaya

koroleva 2

Having watched his human friend Gerda defeat the Snow Queen, troll Orm decides to take credit for the act that set his people free. The troll king offers Orm the hand of his daughter, Princess Maribel, but the mysterious Snow King kidnaps her. Orm and love rival Arrog set off to rescue her. Gerda comes too but is angry to learn that Orm has lied. The Snow King reveals that he is the evil mirror image of Orm – a consequence of his lies. Orm admits that he lied and betrayed Gerda. The truth gives him the strength to defeat the Snow King, releasing Maribel and others. He is hailed for telling the truth and reconciles with Gerda.

Still Alice

USA 2014

Directors: Richard Glatzer, Wash Westmoreland
Certificate 12A 100m 59s

See
The Industry,
page 14

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Alzheimer's seems to have been portrayed on film to date as a disease watched helplessly by men, from the outside. Films such as *Iris* (2001), *Away*

from Her (2006) and even *The Notebook* (2004) show a wife's mental disintegration largely from the husband's standpoint. In directors Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland's sleek, heartfelt weepie-with-dignity, however, we get to see it from the inside. *Still Alice* adopts the point of view of Julianne Moore's linguistics professor Alice, sideswiped in successful midlife by the rapid development of early-onset Alzheimer's, traced from the first ungraspable words to her untethering from daily life.

Formally, this presents a challenge that the film meets expertly on one hand, via Moore's mesmerising but unshowy central performance. Yet rather less adroitly, it relies on shallow-focus sequences heavy with Ilan Eshkeri's uneasy 'internal mood' music to signal Alice's experience of memory loss. These cinema tropes suggest a generic woozy disorientation, and as a result the film – unlike *Memento* (2000) or *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007) – doesn't have a distinctive visual scheme to convey its protagonist's incapacity. Where it scores is in its detailed picture of Alice trying to manage her condition – shoring up her eroding life with phone reminders and word lists. During an eloquent speech to the Alzheimer's Association, the faint cheesiness of the rapturous reception she receives is offset by her dogged insistence on how disturbing it *feels* to lose memories and skills. This painful honesty is one of the film's most successful aspects, perhaps coloured by the fact that co-director Richard Glatzer is living with the degenerative disease amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.

This "art of losing" (a phrase Alice quotes from the Elizabeth Bishop poem 'One Art') widens to a neatly executed narrative theme, as her brilliant career melts away and her marriage and family remake themselves around her. There's a realistic briskness in Alec Baldwin's all-business husband, leavened by the frank curiosity of Kristen Stewart's

Credits and Synopsis

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|---|
| Produced by | A presentation of BSM Studio | Cast | New York, present day. Fifty-year-old linguistics professor Alice starts to forget words during lectures and gets lost while out jogging. Neurology tests show that she has early-onset Alzheimer's, which is inheritable. Alice tries to manage her worsening symptoms but is dismissed from her teaching job after students complain. Her daughter Anna has the gene; she becomes pregnant via IVF to avoid passing it on. Alice tries to persuade her daughter, struggling actress Lydia, to go to college. After viewing a home for dementia sufferers, Alice hides a video message on her laptop for her future self, instructing her to use a hidden pill stash. Her condition deteriorates during a summer spent at the beach, and puts stress on her family. She gives a deeply personal speech to the Alzheimer's Association. Her husband John refuses to take a year's sabbatical to be with her, and makes long-term plans without consulting her. Alice stumbles on the suicide video message but is interrupted by her carer before she can take the pills. John accepts a sought-after job in Boston, and the previously irresponsible Lydia moves in to care for Alice. |
| Lex Lutzus | Alex Lutzus-Brown | Julianne Moore | |
| James Brown | Production in association with Killer Films/Big Indie Pictures, Shriver Films | Alice Howland | |
| Pamela Koffler | A Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland film | Alec Baldwin | |
| Written for the Screen by | Filmed with the support of the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development | John Howland | |
| Richard Glatzer | Executive Producers | Kristen Stewart | |
| Wash Westmoreland | Marie Savare | Kate Bosworth | |
| Based on the book by Lisa Genova | Christine Vachon | Anna Howland-Jones | |
| Director of Photography | Maria Shriver | Hunter Parrish | |
| Denis Lenoir | Celine Rattray | Tom Howland | |
| Editor | Trudie Styler | Daniel Gerroll | |
| Nicolas Chaudeurge | Emille George | Eric Wellman | |
| Production Designer | Nicholas Shumaker | Steve Kunken | |
| Tomaso Ortoni | Jean-Baptiste Babin | Dr Benjamin Shane McCrae | |
| Original Music | David Atlan Jackson | Charlie Howland-Jones | |
| Ilan Eshkeri | Joel Thibout | In Colour [1.85:1] | |
| Location Sound Mixer | | Distributor | |
| James Baker | | Artificial Eye Film Company | |
| Costume Designer | | | |
| Stacey Battat | | | |
| ©BSM Studio Production Companies | | | |



Julianne Moore, Kate Bosworth

'problem' actress daughter, seeking to understand (with Method thoroughness) rather than manage Alice's condition. Delicacy is absent, however, from the film's thumping use of language as metaphor. From the forgetting of the term 'lexicon' in a linguistics lecture to failed neurology word-problems and a final swooping 'Angels in America' speech that stirs Alice's dormant emotions, the film's word worship feels overegged. By contrast, its haute-TV style and determinedly linear narrative could either be considered elegantly uncluttered, allowing its moving central performance legroom – or flatly unimaginative. Tasteful to a fault, and true to its bestselling novel roots, it has a whiff of domestic-tragedy TV movie about it.

But Moore, shaving down her character as she dwindles by degrees, is superb. Full of banked anger and fear at her infantilisation, Alice is an intriguing variation on Moore's trademark damaged women in *Safe* (1995), *Far from Heaven* (2002) or *The Hours* (2002). Seeking some control over her fate, she creates a video instructing her future self to find and use a hidden pill stash. The subsequent discovery of the video makes for a stunning sequence in which Moore's considerable artistry has detached the confused, docile recipient of the advice from the crisp planner on screen so skilfully that you can barely believe they are the same woman. Moore, conveying unimaginable losses in the smallest gestures, is the master here of the art of losing. ☺

Still Life

United Kingdom/Italy/Germany 2012

Director: Uberto Pasolini
Certificate 12A 92m 4s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Who will mourn for those who die forgotten and alone? In a suburban London church, a minister reads a valediction to rows of empty chairs and one sole attendee, indefatigable council employee John May.

Characteristically exuding that particularly sympathetic quality of being one of life's underdogs, Eddie Marsan is spot-on casting as a kindly but almost pathologically reserved council functionary, determined to provide a decent send-off for local residents who pass away without family to care for them. This involves poring through the sad detritus of personal effects left in shabby council properties – in part looking for clues to any surviving relatives who need to be informed – and there's something inherently affecting about these yellowing old photos and dusty knick-knacks, mundane yet telling leftovers of lives that have expired almost unnoticed. With this choice of material, writer-director Uberto Pasolini, once better known as the producer of 1997's surprise homegrown hit *The Full Monty*, is certainly on to something touching and quietly revealing about dissipating community values in today's compartmentalised suburbia – which makes it all the more disappointing that his heavy-handed execution of the story does it no favours at all.

Eschewing the sort of self-effacing naturalism that would have allowed John's quest for a departed alcoholic's long-estranged daughter to speak for itself, Pasolini instead opts for a washed-out palette emphasising murky primary school blue, effectively putting everything in quotes and insisting that we're watching a modern fable. While this heightened approach is a ploy that has served Aki Kaurismäki well in the past, here the emphatic design choices, squared-off compositions and deliberate pacing combine to deliver a film that's far too eager to proclaim its own poignancy. In the meantime, its passing details – look how sad May is, his daily dinner is an upturned can of tuna on toast! – contrive to turn this evidently decent and caring misfit into an unnecessary caricature of socially unskilled bachelordom.



Six feet under: Eddie Marsan

 That Marsan's underplayed performance steadfastly refuses to give into mawkishness proves a saving grace, while Joanne Froggatt is believably down-to-earth as the bereaved relative who may yet present him with a chance to emerge from his lonely rut. Her brief scenes with Marsan have an easy, uncontrived warmth that seems to present the film with an escape route from its at times suffocating air of calculation, but Pasolini, alas, has other ideas. Piling outrageous coincidence on to sickly lachrymosity, he unleashes a climactic flourish whose all-out assault on our tear ducts would almost be laughable were it not accompanied by the elegant tones of Rachel Portman's score, which is typically velvety but not over-rich. It's all so exasperatingly counterproductive, leaving us staggered by the melodramatic crassness of the filmmaking, when *Still Life* in its early stages suggested some degree of reflective empathy with lives passing by otherwise unnoticed behind the curtains in council blocks. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Uberto Pasolini
Felix Vossen

Christopher Simon

Written by

Uberto Pasolini

Director of Photography

Stefano Falivene

Editors

Tracy Granger
Gavin Buckley

Production Designer

Lisa Marie Hall

Music

Rachel Portman

Sound Recordist

Kieron Teather

Costume Designer

Pam Downe

©Exponential (Still Life) Limited Production Companies

A Red Wave/

Embargo Films

production in association with

**Cinecittà Studios,
Exponential Media,
Beta Cinema and
Rai Cinema**

Developed with
the support of the
BFI's Film Fund

Executive Producer

Barnaby
Southcombe

Cast

Eddie Marsan

John May

Joanne Froggatt

Kelly Stuke

Andrew Buchan

council manager

Karen Drury

Mary

Ciaran McIntyre

Jumbo

Paul Anderson

Tim Potter

homeless men

Bronson Webb

morgue attendant

Neil D'Souza

Shakthi

**Wayne Foskett
fishmonger**
**Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]**
Distributor

Curzon Film World

Stones for the Rampart

Poland 2014

Director: Robert Glinski

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Presumably to mark the 70th anniversaries of various WWII events, there has recently been a marked upswing in Polish feature films about the Home Army and its various offshoots.

Kordan Piwowarski's low-key *Baczynski* (2013) celebrated the literary and military activities of one of the country's great WWII poets, while Jan Komasa's big-budget *Warsaw 44* (2014) restaged the doomed Warsaw Uprising on a massive scale, with moments of expressionist horror such as a tsunami of blood and body parts drenching an entire street after an explosion nearby.

Stones for the Rampart comes somewhere between the two: neither as literary as the former (though based on a celebrated 1943 novel by Aleksander Kaminski) nor as hallucinatorily nightmarish as the latter. Instead, it tells the historically fascinating story of the activities of Szare Szeregi ('Grey Ranks'), an unofficial offshoot of the Polish scouting movement that initially specialised in low-level sabotage: gas-bombing cinemas showing German films, desecrating swastika banners and hanging German soldiers in effigy. It's all very jolly – indeed, our heroes Rudy and Zoska could pass for English public-school types, with their floppy hairstyles and comfortable homes and respectable parents.

However, things swiftly turn nasty when a friend is unexpectedly shot dead, Rudy is captured by the Gestapo and the film pitilessly details the techniques used to try to extract information from him, which horrify as much for their low-tech nature (cigarettes, boiling kettles) as for the damage they do to Rudy's increasingly broken body. Although the various attempts to free him still have a *Boy's Own Paper* feel to them (the scouts' spy is a chocolatier who distracts the Germans by selling his produce room to room at Gestapo HQ), they're repeatedly intercut with extreme close-ups of Rudy's crudely shaved head drenched in freshly shed blood – and the film's final act revolves



Grey's anatomy: Marcel Sabat

around the psychological toll placed on Zoska by the human cost of the rescue mission.

Zoska's agony comes from his realisation that for all his disagreements with his adult Home Army superiors, they ultimately have a deeper understanding of notions of 'heroism' and 'patriotism' – specifically, that true heroism can sometimes take the form of pulling back from excessively risky missions, and that patriotism might well involve intentionally sacrificing individuals for the good of the country's long-term future. The film has been attacked from some quarters in Poland for allegedly distorting a much loved novel (Kaminski's grandson joined the naysayers), though its focus on adolescents thrust into aggressively adult situations over which they have no control is characteristic of director Robert Glinski's earlier work (notably 2001's *Hi, Tereska*, about a troubled teenage girl). The film is handsomely shot in Scope by Paweł Edelman (*The Pianist*, *Katyn*) and its action scenes are staged with plenty of panache. But it's the implicit questioning of whether Poland's various resistance activities were truly worthwhile that lingers most as the credits roll. 

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Mariusz Łukomski

Screenplay

Dominik

Wieczorkowski-

Rettinger

Wojciech Palys

Based on the novel by

Aleksander Kaminski

Director of

Photography

Paweł Edelman

Editor

Krzysztof

Szpetmansi

Art Direction

Ewa Skoczkowska

Music

Lukasz Targosz

Sound

Krzysztof Jastrząb

Costumes

Elżbieta Radke

©Monolith Films,

Akces Film

Production

Companies

A Monolith Films

production

in co-production

with Akces Film

co-financed by

the Polski Instytut

Sztuki Filmowej

Polish Film Institute

Executive Producer

Wojciech Palys

Cast

Tomasz Ziętek

Jan Bytnar,

'Rudy'; 'Janek'

Marcel Sabat

Tadeusz Zawadzki

'Zoska'

Kamil Szeptycki

Aleksander

Dawidowski; 'Alek'

Małgorzata Kolesnik

Monia

Sandra

Staniszewska

Hala

Wojciech Zieliński

Stefan Orszak

Andrzej Chyra

Jan Wojciech Kiwerski

Artur Zmijewski

Rudy's father

Danuta Stenka

Rudy's mother

Krzysztof Globisz

Zoska's father

Olgierd Lukaszewicz

Dr Trojanowski

Piotr Bondyra

Pawel

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles
Distributor

Kaleidoscope Film

Distribution

Polish theatrical title

Kamienie na szaniec

Occupied Warsaw, 1943. Janek (nicknamed 'Rudy') and Tadeusz (nicknamed 'Zoska') are members of Szare Szeregi ('Grey Ranks'), a clandestine paramilitary wing of the Polish scouting movement, under the command of Stefan Orszak. They perform minor acts of sabotage while trying to obtain a viable arms cache. Their friend Paweł is killed during an ambush of a German vehicle, and Major Jan Kiwerski of the Polish Home Army criticises Orszak for his death. Rudy is arrested by the Gestapo, asked about Szare Szeregi and is tortured when he either refuses to speak or gives the names of dead people. Zoska tries to organise a rescue but Orszak refuses to sanction it without the major's permission. Finally, with the badly wounded Rudy already in transit in a German truck, permission is granted, and Zoska and his comrades mount a full-scale assault, in which two of them are killed. Rudy is rescued and confirms to the major that he didn't betray anyone but he dies of his injuries shortly afterwards. The Germans round up 200 Poles and massacre them in reprisal. Zoska, in shock, is talked out of suicide by his girlfriend Hala. During a confrontation with the major, Zoska learns that his father was instrumental in delaying the rescue mission, and he angrily disowns him. Zoska heads a successful mission to kill the two Gestapo agents who tortured Rudy. During a subsequent mission, Zoska is confronted by an armed German, and lets himself be killed.

Taken 3

Director: Olivier Mégaton
Certificate 12A 108m 37s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

In voicing one's doubt that any two shots in *Taken 3* cut together, there is a risk of making it sound avant-garde; and perhaps one should give it the benefit of the doubt, since it is really too fast to judge. Or is it just that the radical discontinuity makes the pace seem faster, since one struggles to make connections between shots?

Either way, one struggles to make connections between shots. The action sequences are a blur of rapid movements slapped against other rapid movements, lacking in suspense and even rudimentary excitement. The technique appears to have been designed to obscure the cheapness of the production and the impossibility of what takes place.

Still, the action sequences aren't as bad as the non-action sequences, whose dialogue, performances and even photography wouldn't pass muster on a soap opera. Olivier Megaton's boisterous name conceals a timid directorial persona: he has no idea where to put the camera. The plot stringing it all together is idiotic: when Liam Neeson is framed for his ex-wife's murder, he evades the police and discovers a clue implicating the real perpetrators, the Russian mob. But instead of following it up, the police continue to chase Neeson, who causes the deaths of numerous civilians rather than be interviewed and wait for the CCTV footage that would provide his alibi. ☀



Take that: Marcel Sabat, Sam Spruell

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Luc Besson

Written by

Luc Besson

Robert Mark Kamen

Director of

Photography

Eric Kress

Editors

Audrey Simonaud

Nicolas

Trembasiewicz

Production

Designer

Sébastien Inizan

Original Score

Nathaniel Méchaly

Sound Mixer

Stéphane Bucher

Costume Designer

Olivier Bérot

Stunt Co-ordinator

Mark Vanselow

Production

Companies

Twentieth Century

Fox presents a

EuroCorp, M6

Films co-production

With the

participation

of Canal+, M6

and Ciné+

Cast

Liam Neeson

Bryan Mills

Forest Whitaker

Frank Dotzler

Famke Janssen

Lenore St John

Maggie Grace

Kim Mills

Dougray Scott

Stuart St John

Sam Spruell

Oleg Malankov

Leland Orser

Sam

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Part-subtitled

Distributor

20th Century Fox

International (UK)

LA, the present. Bryan Mills is framed for the murder of his ex-wife Lenore, and goes on the run. Under duress, Lenore's husband Stuart tells Bryan that the Russian mobster Malankov, to whom he owes money, was responsible. But even as Bryan takes on the Russians, his daughter Kim begins to suspect Stuart's complicity, which is confirmed by Malankov before his death. Stuart takes Kim hostage; Bryan chases them, rescues Kim and leaves Stuart to the police.

Tinker Bell and the Legend of the NeverBeast

USA 2014, Director: Steve Loter
Certificate U 76m 12s

Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

This is the sixth of the feature-length *Tinker Bell* films, Disney's CGI cartoons about the titular fairy and her winged friends. Tink is only a supporting character here – this time the central protagonist is the russet-clad Fawn, a reckless, animal-loving fairy who's drawn to the most fearsome creatures. While Fawn was in previous *Tinker Bell* films, her voice is new; she's played by Ginnifer Goodwin, Snow White in Disney's live-action TV series *Once upon a Time*. Several other actors return from previous instalments, including Anjelica Huston as the fairy queen.

Legend of the NeverBeast is a perfectly decent children's adventure, with some thematic ambition. The story has Fawn finding a grumpy-faced, monstrous-looking animal, and we're genuinely unsure whether the creature is benign or a threat. The characters on both sides of the argument, including Fawn herself, must face up to the possibility that they're terribly mistaken, and the ending deals with last farewells and death, though in a suitably softened form.

Of course, most of the film is lighter. Fawn's first boisterous run-flight around her glade is especially pleasing, but so are simpler moments, such as the fairies 'walking' casually on thin air. Fawn herself is characterised as a scrape-prone child, and her interactions with the other fairies are surprisingly funny. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Michael Wigert

Screenplay

Tom Rogers

Robert Schooley

Mark McCorkle

Kate Kondell

Story

Steve Loter

Tom Rogers

Editor

Margaret Hou

Art Director

Ellen Jin Over

Original Score

Dougray Scott

Composed by

Joel McNeely

Sound Design/

Supervising

Sound Editor

Todd Toon

Animation

Supervisor

Michael Greenholt

©Disney

Enterprises, Inc.

Production

Companies

Disney

DisneyToon Studios

Executive Producer

John Lasseter

In Colour

Voice Cast

Ginnifer Goodwin

Fawn

Mae Whitman

Tinker Bell

Rosario Dawson

Nyx

Lucy Liu

Silvermist

Raven-Symoné

Iridesca

Megan Hilty

Rosetta

Pamela Adlon

Vidia

Danai Gurira

Fury

Chloe Bennet

Chase

Thomas Lennon

Scribble

Jeff Corwin

Buck

Olivia Holt

Morgan

Grey Griffin

narrator

Kari Wahlgren

Robin

Anjelica Huston

Queen Clarion

In Colour

[1.78:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor

Buena Vista International (UK)

Two Night Stand

USA 2014
Director: Max Nichols
Certificate 15 86m 3s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

On the occasion of *Two Night Stand*'s US release, the *New Yorker* profiled director Max Nichols, favourably comparing his feature debut with his father's sophomore effort, *The Graduate* (1967). Without the rose-coloured glasses of nepotism, it's apparent that *Two Night Stand* actually shares DNA with a different movie starring Dustin Hoffman: Peter Yates's 1969 *John and Mary*. Banking on the supposedly novel realism of their identical narrative arcs, both tap into the zeitgeist of New York dating culture, yet fail to evoke any emotional truths thanks in part to kismet-heavy plot twists and awkward attempts to ape fashionable formal devices.

But how big a truth bomb could anyone drop about young, straight, white people getting to know each other after a one-night stand anyway? Though Analeigh Tipton (a former *America's Next Top Model* contestant) and Miles Teller conjure some chemistry, it's difficult to stomach the abrupt shifts between standard romcom verbal sparring ("You are an asshole in so many languages!") and excruciatingly detailed mumblecore explanations of their feelings. Burdened by non-stop chatter, the visuals are straitjacketed into an endless series of shot/countershoot inside a massive, ultra-hip apartment whose decor is endlessly more inspiring than any of the characters. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Beau Flynn

Ruben Fleischer

Sam Englebardt

William D. Johnson

Written by

Mark Hammer

Director of

Photography

Bobby Bukowski

Editor

Matt Garner

Production

Designer

Molly Hughes

Original Music

The de Luca Brothers

Sound Mixer

Justin Gray

Costume Designer

Amy Roth

©Apartment

Two, Inc.

Production

Companies

Demarest Films

presents in

association with

The Solution

Entertainment Group

a FlynnPictureCo.,

Distributor

claudiemysdog

and Demarest

Films production

Filmed with the

support of the

New York State

Governor's Office

for Motion Picture

& Television

Development

Executive Producers

Adam Yoelin

Mark Hammer

David Greathouse

Lauren Selig

Cast

Miles Teller

Alec

Analeigh Tipton

Megan

Jessica Szohr

Faiza

Scott Mescudi

Cedric

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

New York, the present. Having been dumped by her fiancé, Megan arranges a one-night stand through an online dating site and goes to the Brooklyn apartment of bank worker Alec. An overnight blizzard prevents her from leaving the next day. The two get to know each other. Megan accidentally clogs Alec's toilet, so they break into his neighbour's apartment to relieve themselves. They give each other sex tips and make passionate love. Alec reveals that he lives with someone who is cheating on him. Megan leaves. Alec's girlfriend returns and he breaks up with her. He has Megan arrested for breaking into his neighbour's apartment. He goes to pick her up at the jail. She forgives him and they kiss.

The Wedding Ringer

Director: Jeremy Garelick
Certificate 15 101m 1s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

The Wedding Ringer's premise is that many soon-to-be-wed American men lacking close friends must draw upon the services of Jimmy Callahan (Kevin Hart), who runs a tidy business as a pretend best man. As in *My Best Friend* (2006) and *I Love You, Man* (2009), what begins as a relationship of convenience builds to something stronger, eliding the role of the monstrous woman who necessitated the initial connection (a 'bros before hos' ethos is unapologetically, unpleasantly alive here).

In the opening scene, Doug Harris (Josh Gad) makes dozens of calls to long-lost casual acquaintances, asking them to be the best man at his upcoming wedding to prototypical bridezilla Gretchen (Kaley Cuoco-Sweeting). The point is that Doug has no close acquaintances, let alone a best friend, but the scene ends abruptly on an unrelated note, with a glass desk collapsing from under him – the first of many endless reminders that Doug is overweight (Gad's defining attribute here), but rhythmically utterly unrelated to what's come before.

Allowed to work blue, Hart doesn't expand his established shouty range much: as Gad is endlessly fat, so his sidekick's shortness is endlessly amusing. *The Wedding Ringer* is rancidly amused by stuttering, children being beaten up, etc: its heart is in a thoroughly nasty place, which would be OK if the jokes were funnier or the premise less implausible. (Doug is wealthy and affable, so his friendlessness never seems more than a plot-instigating contrivance.)

Increasingly pushing Gretchen from merely annoying to truly awful, the film posits that marriage is the sum of two people lying to each other about who they are out of mutual narcissism: it's a considerably less funny *Gone Girl* prequel. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Adam Fields

Will Packer

Written by

Jeremy Garelick

Jay Lavender

Director of Photography

Bradford Lipson

Editors

Jeff Groth

Shelly Westerman

Byron Wong

Production Designer

Chris Cornell

Music

Christopher

Lennertz

Production Sound Mixer

Jim Stuebe

Costume Designer

Genevieve Tyrrell

Production Companies

Screen Gems

presents in association with

LStar Capital an

Adam Fields/Will

Packer Productions

Executive Producers

Zanne Devine

Jeremy Garelick

Jay Lavender

Glenn S. Gainer

Ben Waisbren

Josh Gad

Doug Harris

Kaley Cuoco-Sweeting

Gretchen

Ken Howard

Ed Palmer

Cloris Leachman

grandma

Jenifer Lewis

Doris Jenkins

Mimi Rogers

Lois Palmer

Olivia Thirlby

Alison Palmer

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Cast

Kevin Hart

Jimmy Callahan

Los Angeles, the present. Tax barrister Doug Harris has no close friends, and therefore no best man or groomsmen for his forthcoming wedding. He is referred to Jimmy Callahan, who provides fake friends for wedding ceremonies. Preparing for the wedding, the two grow closer. After the ceremony, officiated by Jimmy masquerading as a minister, Doug hears fiancée Gretchen Palmer saying that she doesn't love him, and he realises he doesn't love her either. He leaves with Jimmy, now his real best friend.

White God

Hungary/Germany/Sweden 2014

Director: Kornél Mundruczó

Certificate 15 120m 48s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

As the title's nod to Sam Fuller's *White Dog* (1982) makes clear, Kornél Mundruczó's *White God* is a parable of racism; but where in Fuller's movie the dog itself, trained to attack only blacks, was a stand-in for white racists, the dogs in Mundruczó's film represent the victims (the underdogs, as it were), condemned as mongrels to be fined, imprisoned or killed. The relevance to present-day Europe, and especially to the director's native Hungary, where the ultra-right racist Jobbik party is in the ascendant, is evident; but not for the first time the filmmaker's reach has outstripped his grasp. Mundruczó's ambition is never in question, but as in *Johanna* (2005) and *Tender Son* (2010), his takes on the Joan of Arc and Frankenstein legends respectively, the simplistic treatment falls well short of his weighty theme.

What's undeniably impressive here – especially since it was apparently accomplished without resorting to CGI – is the dog-handling. Animal coordinator Teresa Ann Miller and trainer Árpád Halász not only succeed in convincingly turning the loveable Labrador-cross Hagen into a snarling monster, but send a huge pack of dogs bounding and barking through the streets of Budapest in an undulating canine carpet. Equally impressive is Zsófia Psotta as Hagen's young owner, the thirteen-year-old Lili, making her screen debut in a remarkably assured performance that conveys staunch defiance without a hint of petulance.

The tone of *White God* veers all over the place. When Hagen is first forcibly separated from Lili, dumped on a busy street by her ill-tempered dad, it seems at first that we're in for a remake of *The Incredibly Journey* as he's befriended by a cute terrier who introduces him to a whole colony of feral dogs and then plays hide-and-seek with the wicked dog-catchers. When he's taken by brutal dog-fighters, the film slips towards noir territory, and by the time a vast pack of hounds is terrorising the city we're into full-on allegory.



Pet shop girl: Zsófia Psotta

(“These are the moments when masses revolt. This is Europe’s current fear,” Mundruczó explains.) This canine *jacquerie* seems strangely selective, though: rather than rising up against the oppressor classes as a whole, they target only those individuals who have been nasty to Hagen.

The film’s finale, a textbook illustration of Congreve’s famous dictum that ‘Music has charms to soothe a savage breast,’ plumbs a level of banality that makes everything preceding it look subtle by comparison – though offering further evidence of Miller and Halász’s exceptional dog-wrangling skills. Asher Goldschmidt’s overemphatic score ladles on the melodrama, and at two hours the film feels seriously overstretched – the incipient romance between Lili and a sympathetic young pianist in her youth orchestra could well have been jettisoned. *White God* won the Un Certain Regard prize at Cannes last year. It seems a bizarre choice. S

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Viktória Petrányi

Screenplay

Kata Weber

Kornél Mundruczó

Viktória Petrányi

Cinematographer

Marcell Rév

Editor

Dávid Jancsó

Production Designer

Márton Ágh

Music

Asher Goldschmidt

Sound

Thomas Huhn

Gábor Balázs

Costume Designer

Sabine Greunig

Cinematographer

©Proton Cinema, Pola

Pandora, Chimney

Production Companies

In co-production

with Pola Pandora,

Chimney,

Filmpartners, Film

iVast, ZDF/Arte

presents a Proton

Cinema production

With the support of

Hungarian National

Film Fund, Eurimages,

Medienboard

Berlin-Brandenburg,

Swedish Film Institute

In co-production

with Pola Pandora,

Chimney,

Filmpartners, Film

iVast, ZDF/Arte

A film by Kornél

Mundruczó

Executive Producer

Eszter Gyárfás

Cast

Zsófia Psotta

Lili

Luke

Body

Hagen the dog

Sándor Szótér

Daniel

Szabolcs Thuróczy

old man

Lili Monori

Bév

László Gálffy

music teacher

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Metrodome

dogs. Dog-catchers appear; Hagen evades them but is caught by a dog-fight trainer, who drugs and beats him to arouse his aggressive instincts, before selling him to another dog-fighter. Hagen wins his first fight. Afterwards he escapes again but is caught by dog-catchers who take him to the pound to be destroyed. He kills the guard who's trying to put him down and escapes with dozens of other dogs. They rampage through the city, causing panic, and invade the concert hall where Lili's orchestra is playing. Grabbing her bike, Lili cycles off to find Hagen. The dogs kill both dog-fighters, the butcher and the neighbour; led by Hagen they mass outside Daniel's abattoir, where Lili has arrived. Daniel lights a flamethrower to hold them off, but Lili starts playing her trumpet and all the dogs lie down quietly.

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Home cinema



Poe faced: Vincent Price in Roger Corman's *Tales of Terror*

COBWEBS AND CANDELABRA

An impressive Poe anthology provides a useful reminder of how much Roger Corman has mattered to the movie business

SIX GOTHIC TALES BY EDGAR ALLAN POE

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER/ THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM/ TALES OF TERROR/ THE RAVEN/ THE HAUNTED PALACE/ THE TOMB OF LIGEIA

Roger Corman; USA/UK 1960-64; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray; 79/81/89/87/86/82 minutes; Certificates PG/12/15; 2.35:1; Features: An Evening of Edgar Allan Poe' (1970, 52 minutes), 'Behind the Swinging Blade,' 'The Directors: Roger Corman,' 'The Two Faces of Peter Lorre' (1984, 61 minutes), director/actor/critic commentaries, new/ archival interviews with Joe Dante, Jonathan Rigby, Vincent

Price, Roger Corman, Richard Matheson, Paul Mayersberg, David Tringham, Bob Jordan and Kenneth V. Jones, video pieces by David Cairns, Kim Newman and Anne Billson, additional TV scene for 'The Pit and the Pendulum', short films 'The Black Cat' and 'The Trick' by Rob Green, hardback book containing essays by Tim Lucas, Jonathan Rigby, Roger Clarke, Vic Pratt, Roger Luckhurst and Julian Upton, print interview with Roger Corman, excerpt from a memoir by Vincent Price, reproductions of the Dell Comics adaptations of 'Tales of Terror,' 'The Raven' and 'The Tomb of Ligeia'

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Obviously it's a pity that Arrow wasn't able to anthologise all eight of Roger Corman's Poe films. Rights issues keep the inessential *The Premature Burial* (1962) and the very much missed *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964) off this set, while Corman's adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft's *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* makes the cut because American International marketed it as

'Edgar Allan Poe's *The Haunted Palace*'. But let's not quibble. It's cool to have good HD transfers of six of the films, and Arrow has gone to town with the supplements and the accompanying book. It's an impressive package, and we can only hope that when BDs of the two missing films come along they'll be equally well presented.

Corman hasn't really mattered in the film business for decades now, so this set is a useful reminder that he once really did. He came into the industry in the mid-1950s, just as Allan Dwan was leaving it for television, and picked up exactly where Dwan left off – with a string of low-budget westerns, sci-fi movies and thrillers. A certain directorial talent and sensibility began to assert itself in some of his programme-filling quickies (I'm still waiting for the academic paper arguing that *Rock All Night*, 1957, with its gangster on the lam hiding out in a music club where

The Platters are performing, is the prototype for *Performance*) and it emerged more or less fully formed in his subsequently famous black comedies *A Bucket of Blood* (1959) and *The Little Shop of Horrors* (1960). But it was the Poe cycle which established him as a 'name' and which, to some extent, marked a turning-point in his career.

The Fall of the House of Usher (it was just *House of Usher* in the US, presumably because AIP financed it on the basis that the house itself was the monster) was the fourth of six movies Corman released in 1960. (The others included a war movie, two black comedies, a minimalist 'epic' – and *The Last Woman on Earth*, Corman's first work with Robert Towne, as both writer and pseudonymous actor.) He had dabbled in gothicisms before, notably in *The Undead* (1956), but *Usher* boldly reinvented the idiom, going much further into fateful thunderstorms, flickering candelabra and cobwebbed vaults than James Whale or any of the Germanic expressionists had done. The two key members of the *Usher* crew remained on board for most of the later Poe films: veteran Murnau/Flaherty cinematographer Floyd Crosby (father of David), who had shot quite a few of Corman's quickies in the 50s but nothing remotely prestigious since *High Noon* in 1952 (unless you count second unit on *The Old Man and the Sea*), and production designer Daniel Haller, likewise a veteran of the quickies and subsequently the not-great director of several Corman knock-offs. The key member of the cast also became a constant: Vincent Price.

Of course Hammer had launched a gothic revival of its own three years before *Usher* with the first of the Terence Fisher Frankenstein and Dracula movies, but the Hammer films were essentially Gainsborough-style costume dramas with added gore – and, at least initially, far less daringly perverse than Powell/Pressburger films made a decade earlier. Joe Dante in the interview provided here as an extra says he's fairly sure that Corman hadn't seen any of the Fisher movies when he turned to Poe, but *Usher* and its successors seem equally unindebted to Universal's pre-war Poe movies with Bela Lugosi, such as Robert Florey's *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932) or Lew Landers's *The Raven* (1935). It's well known (and retold more than once in the extras here) that Corman persuaded AIP to make one A feature in colour and Scope rather than two black-and-white B movies, and Corman, fascinated by fantasy and horror fiction from an early age, says that he proposed *Usher* because he'd read Poe in high school. *Usher* certainly tapped a vein of gothic cliché, but the film's particular impact sprang from a fortuitous conjunction of disparate elements: AIP's grindhouse schtick plus Price's aestheticism and pretensions to 'serious acting' plus Corman's burgeoning ambitions to use dollies and cranes to produce more stylish images. It helped that Corman had a nodding acquaintance with the theories of Freud and Jung to bring to the party.

Corman has often complained that he felt trapped into repeating himself when AIP pressured him to go on making Poe movies; he explains the problem quite eloquently in his



Tortured artist: *The Pit and the Pendulum*

commentary track on *The Tomb of Ligeia* here. In fact, though, the challenge he faced in keeping himself interested prompted some of his best and most innovative work. *Usher* is straightforward lugubrious gothic melodrama, but its immediate sequel *The Pit and the Pendulum* (much enhanced by the presence of Barbara Steele) uses a near-identical plot to far more dynamic effect.

Corman had dabbled in gothicisms before, notably in 'The Undead', but 'Usher' reinvented the idiom



Barbara Steele in *The Pit and the Pendulum*

The breakthrough comes in the fourth film, the short-story anthology *Tales of Terror*, partly because scriptwriter Richard Matheson no longer needs to pad out a brief storyline with repetitions (the first episode, 'Morella', is a concise recap of the earlier films, complete with another climactic conflagration), but mostly because Peter Lorre joins the cast for the middle episode, 'The Black Cat'. Lorre plays Montressor Herringbone, a connoisseur of wine and a bad-tempered lush, who kills his wife and her lover and bricks up their corpses in the basement; it's by some way the best part he got in his dying years, and his brilliantly funny improvisations while playing drunk – breaking bad, you could say – prompt Vincent Price (as the effete adulterer Fortunato) to raise his game too. This inspired double act is reprised as something closer to slapstick in *The Raven*, an overt comedy which stays this side of frivolity because the clowning takes place under the grave gaze of Boris Karloff.

After turning to Lovecraft in what would be a vain attempt to escape Poe, Corman fetched up in England for the last two films in the series, the Bergman-inspired *The Masque of the Red Death* and the remarkably serious and intense *The Tomb of Ligeia*, which plays (largely on Norfolk locations and in daylight) like a cousin to Michael Powell's *Gone to Earth*. *Ligeia* here gets superb extras, notably an amusingly revelatory interview with Paul Mayersberg, credited assistant producer, uncredited second-unit director and doctor to Robert Towne's script. Engrossing throughout, the set's extras also include the first UK release of any film by the late Harun Farocki, an hour-long 1984 documentary about Peter Lorre. The dour Farocki is predictably contemptuous of Lorre's Corman films, but his doc is less doctrinaire than most of his stuff – and it contains some invaluable archive material. ☀

New releases

Ganja & Hess

Bill Gunn; USA 1973; Eureka/Region 2 Blu-ray and DVD Dual Format; 113 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: commentary, short documentary 'The Blood of the Thing', full-colour booklet with essays and letter written by Bill Gunn to the 'New York Times'

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Philadelphia-born actor/playwright/novelist/director Bill Gunn, who died from encephalitis in 1989 aged 54, remains one of America's most underrated creative forces. He was a fiercely individualistic talent whose work tackled issues germane to the African-American experience with an ingenuity and complexity that few could match. His acerbic screenplay for Hal Ashby's *The Landlord* (1970), for example, gets to the heart of white middle-class gentrification of economically deprived black areas in a manner that resounds today. Even in the more permissive climate of late-60s/early-70s American cinema, Gunn's work was seen by the establishment as overly controversial: his feature debut *Stop* (1970) – a tortuous love-quadrangle – was slapped with an X certificate, before Warner Bros recut and finally shelved it. It remains unseen today, though there is hope that it will be unearthed.

The issue of frustrated expectations is relevant to Gunn's best-known work, *Ganja & Hess*, which boasts its own dismaying history of troubled distribution. Its studio, Kelly-Jordan Enterprises, was expecting a straightforward blaxploitation cash-in after the success of William Crain's lurid *Blacula* (1972), and was horrified when Gunn delivered nothing of the sort. Despite its rapturous reception at Cannes in 1973, the film was swiftly recut into a travesty of skinflick salaciousness, and boxed up under no fewer than six different titles including *Blackout: The Moment of Terror* and, even more terribly, *Black Evil*.

So what offended the studio so much? Well, even by elliptical arthouse standards, *Ganja & Hess* is a challenging work. It's a bleak, kaleidoscopic vampire film in which the V-word is never once mentioned, and it substitutes bloody thrills for an oblique *mélange* of contemporary class, racial and religious commentary, Afro-European symbolism and sexual deviance. Its fragmentary structure and explicit (but never titillating) fusion of sex and death recalls the psychologically troubling work of Nicolas Roeg (in particular 1980's *Bad Timing*) more than the Manichean social dynamics of standard blaxploitation fare.

The hazy plot follows the exploits of wealthy anthropologist Dr Hess Green (*Night of the Living Dead*'s Duane Jones), who becomes a vampire after his crazed assistant George Meda (a terrifyingly intense Gunn) stabs him with a dagger that carries an ancient African curse. Meda commits suicide, and Green falls in love with his haughty widow Ganja (the statuesque Marlene Clark), who soon becomes his vampiric partner in crime.

This troubling film is so visually rich and thematically complex that it's not hard to see why Spike Lee co-opted it for his forthcoming Kickstarter-funded remake *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus*. If Lee attains half the disquieting power of Gunn's film, he'll do well.

Disc: A crisp transfer is mercifully less muddy than other home-video editions.

I'm All Right Jack

John Boulting; UK 1959; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 100 minutes; 1.67:1

Reviewed by Jo Botting

The Boulting brothers' satirical swipes at aspects of British society reached a glorious crescendo with this dig at industrial relations. While some viewed the film as an indictment of trade unions (including the film technicians themselves, who walked off set, apparently because the twins hadn't paid their union dues), no one comes off well in it, management being portrayed as wholly corrupt and no less indolent than the constantly striking workers. The only person who preserves his integrity is Stanley Windrush (Ian Carmichael), a character first seen in the twins' earlier hit *Private's Progress*, a benignly incompetent upper-class twit who publicly exposes both sides for what they are. One has to look to the female characters for common sense, Mrs Kite (Irene Handl) and Stanley's Aunt Dolly (Margaret Rutherford) finding that, despite their class differences, they both agree that things just aren't what they used to be.

The view that the post-war world had gone to rack and ruin seems naive today, and watching now we can only yearn for the days when television announcements were made by ladies in evening gowns. Comments on trends such as cynical advertising and the rise of synthetic packaged food pepper the narrative but, delivered with the Boultings' affectionate humour, make their mark gently rather than ramming the message home.

The film's chief pleasure is the appearance of Boulting regulars such as Handl, Carmichael, Richard Attenborough and Terry-Thomas, but it is Peter Sellers's performance as Fred Kite that stands out, winning him the British Film Academy Award for Best Actor. Interviews featured in the extras reveal that Sellers was nervous about his transition from clowning to acting, but Roy Boulting recounts how his insecurity fell away when he heard the crew's laughter at his portrayal of the pompous yet insecure union foreman.

Disc: A couple of the exterior scenes look a little washed-out but otherwise the film has transferred well to Blu-ray. The extras are all Sellers-related, top of the bill being Richard Lester's anarchic short *The Running, Jumping & Standing Still Film*. Also worthwhile are the extracts from *Sellers Best*, a 1992 TV documentary.



Union man: Peter Sellers in *I'm All Right Jack*

Independencia

Raya Martin; The Philippines 2009; Second Run/Region 0 DVD; 74 minutes; Certificate 15; 1.33:1; Features: two short films by Raya Martin (one new), 'making of', trailer, DVD-Rom content (script, music cues), brochure with translated essay by Antoine Thirion

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Second Run heroically continues to belie its name by publishing hitherto unshown/unreleased titles such as this oddity from the Philippines. Raya Martin is (with John Torres) one of the leading lights in a small group of indie-avant-garde filmmakers who are essentially acolytes of Lav Diaz – although (unlike Diaz himself) none of them started out making commercial melodramas. *Independencia* is the middle panel of a projected trilogy, intended to represent the three colonisations of the Philippines, by the Spanish, the Americans and the Japanese. (The third film remains pending; Martin's progress seems to have stalled since the sad death of his main exegete Alexis Tioseco, who subtitled *Independencia*.)

Martin's eccentric approach, derived equally from Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Guy Maddin, is to distil the historical period he's tackling into an enigmatic parable and to film it in the approximate style of cinema of the period. Here, a mother alarmed by the approach of the American army leads her adolescent son into the jungle, where they settle in an abandoned shack and subsist on what they can cultivate or catch. A young wife for the son eventually turns up in the undergrowth; the mother dies; some years later, the couple's son loses both parents and runs into marauding Americans. The boy is last seen jumping off a cliff into a very uncertain future; the script says he leaps into a river, but the film itself is purposely ambiguous. This is filmed in what Martin imagines to be the style of an early talkie, augmented with brief throwbacks to silent-movie tricks such as thoughts and memories appearing as cameos within the frame. Aside from a brief prologue, compositions are fixed-frame and the whole thing is shot in studio sets with painted backdrops. It's in monochrome, with a little hand-colouring in the closing scene. It all looks quite lovely.

Meanings are fairly elusive, though it's clear that Martin takes a pessimistic view of the Filipino struggle for a national identity: the characters inhabit a grungy soap opera (the mother hates her daughter-in-law for 'stealing' her son, etc), and everyone clings to a hopeless mixture of animist beliefs, superstition and Catholic rituals inherited from the Spanish. A pretentious brochure essay by ex-*Cahiers* critic Antoine Thirion has a lot to say about Part One of the trilogy – *A Short Film About the Indio Nacional*, a pastiche silent made in 2005 – but nothing about this film's obscurities. A 16-minute 'making of' reveals only that Martin casts actors for their 'look' and likes his choices here. Two short films by Martin cry out for explications, which are conspicuously absent: the silent *Track Projections* looks like an installation piece, and *Excerpt from 'INDEPENDENCIA 86: The Lost Film of Arturo Madlangbayan'* re-edited by Miko Reverenza and Raya Martin means nothing without its backstory. Still, the overall package



LEGAL HIGH

Far from running out of dramatic steam, the slick US lawyers-and-politics show just gets better. Case closed

THE GOOD WIFE SEASONS 1–5

CBS; USA 2009–14; Paramount/Region 2 DVD; 4,865 minutes; Certificate 15; 1.78:1; Features: audio commentaries, deleted scenes, documentaries, gag reel, interviews, 'Alan Cumming's Videos'

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

The first episode of the fifth season of *The Good Wife* aired in the US on the same night as the last episode of AMC's *Breaking Bad*. In the UK the latter was streamed on Netflix. The contrast couldn't be clearer: on one channel the acclaimed 'dark' cable series with the much profiled showrunner and name guest directors, bowing out at a time of its choosing after 62 episodes, all in the can before the season began; on the other a slick, studio-bound network legal drama, with 90 episodes under its belt already, produced in the old-fashioned deadline-chasing way – well regarded but not in the same league, a thing of the past not the future. *Breaking Bad* even beat it in the ratings that night.

But episode 91, 'Everything Is Ending', a far from unfamiliar tale in which our lawyer heroes scramble to win a reprieve for a probably innocent man on death row, even as they prepare to knife one another in the back, was a belter, and the season was the best so far. Bearing in mind that *The West Wing*, the last great network series, effectively ended after four years, with Aaron Sorkin's exit leaving behind a husk, this is some feat. Season 5 led up to a death and its aftermath, and if the loss capsizes the show – or, perhaps, even if it doesn't – it will have been worth it.

With the closest thing to rigour that a 22-episode schedule permits, *The Good Wife* has shown the unfolding of a character, Alicia Florrick (Julianna Margulies), self-sacrificing political wife turned put-upon junior lawyer turned partner. The death of her sometime lover Will Gardner (Josh Charles) came as a shock on first viewing, yet to a degree more appreciable in retrospect, the prospect of Charles's departure seems to have inspired showrunners Robert and Michelle King to bring the show's central conflicts into sharp focus.

The preceding episode, in which Alicia has to give a keynote speech to the Bar Association, recapitulates the origin of the series: when her corrupt, philandering politician husband Peter (Chris Noth) is jailed, Alicia, whose career was interrupted by a 13-year maternity leave, has to find work. No law firm will take on a mother in her forties, and her college friend Will – who, free from family responsibilities, has risen to name partner – hires her, over objections from fellow partner Diane Lockhart (Christine Baranski), for reasons that do not derive solely from a regard for her professional capabilities. And in the



Law society: the cast of *The Good Wife*

course of writing the speech, Alicia, now in Will and Diane's position, comes to the realisation that she would not have hired herself either.

It's typical of *The Good Wife*'s ironic approach that Alicia has to tailor her words to impress a female client – "play up the feminism angle", a young male colleague advises her, as if that's all it is – so that there is no way she can speak anything like the complicated truth in public; and it's typical of the show's humour that everyone walks out anyway, not because the speech is evasive (though it is) but because Alicia's sharkish audience catches scent, via text, of a big deal going down elsewhere.

Mobile phones figure in scene after scene – a phone call terminates Alicia and Will's last real conversation; her grieving involves playing a voicemail message over and over – and while *The Good Wife* is old-fashioned in form (but then so are the vaunted cable and internet series), it inhabits the 2010s like few other shows. Lockhart Gardner's unsavoury client list includes a Silicon Valley billionaire, and the Kings have long torn their plots from the tech press headlines. In

The Chicago legal-political setting is surely meant to evoke the Obamas' pre-Washington years

Season 5 it's the NSA, imagined as a giant *The Crowd*-like office staffed by callow Redditor types.

Similarly contemporary is *The Good Wife*'s dispirited view of the political scene. The Chicago legal-political setting is surely meant to evoke the Obamas' pre-Washington years; Peter's *consigliere* Eli Gold (Alan Cumming) is a comic version of Rahm Emanuel; and the Kings are in a position to call in cameos from Democrat players such as Bill de Blasio and Donna Brazile – but the result is less chummy than it sounds. Peter's misdeeds are serious, and Alicia's hands grow dirtier with success. Crucially, though, there is never any strong critique from within the drama. Peter's antagonists are working their own angle.

The Good Wife's characters, always on call, have colleagues rather than friends, and Alicia and Will's relationship is soured, in part, by professional vanity, the shallowness of which is thrown into cruel relief by his death. Alicia's cultural life consists of late-night cable drama, her favourite in Season 5 being "AMC's *Darkness at Noon*", a send-up of the earnest and humourless 'Difficult Man' tendency that has marked much recent US TV, and introduced, pointedly, on the night of *True Detective*'s season finale. Whereas *Darkness*'s bad-cop lead has to mumble pseudo profundities about 'crossing lines' to make sure the audience knows where it stands, *The Good Wife*, for all its unabashed affection for 'dramatics', seldom deals in reassuring certainties. ☀

New releases



intrigues and it's good that at least one film from this Pinoy subculture is available.

Disc: A flawless standard-definition transfer, in the original Academy ratio.

KINETTA

Yorgos Lanthimos; Greece 2005; Second Run/Region 0 DVD; 94 minutes; Certificate 15; 2.35:1 anamorphic; Features: Lanthimos Q&A, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

A decade after its premiere, Yorgos Lanthimos's largely plotless solo feature debut seems much less formally daunting (and/or exasperating) than it first appeared, thanks to our greater familiarity not just with his later *Dogtooth* (2009) and *Alps* (2011) but also with other examples of the so-called Greek 'Weird Wave' (a term the filmmakers dislike as much as Philip Glass and Steve Reich hate being called 'minimalists', but it seems to have stuck) such as *Attenburg* (2010) by his producer Athina Rachel Tsangari.

That said, this shouldn't be a first port of call for complete Lanthimos newcomers. It's initially easy enough to tune into the film's central theme of disparate characters seeking to escape the grim reality of life in an off-season resort, indulging in various forms of fantasy (about unattainable people and branded consumer goods) and staging or participating in reconstructions of real-life crimes for reasons seemingly other than a desire to assist an official investigation – not least because they give rise to numerous quirky diversions of a kind we can now recognise as being characteristic of the Lanthimos universe.

In particular, the role-playing clearly foreshadows that in the more accomplished *Alps*. But the ultra-sparse dialogue (the first subtitle appears six minutes in and there are precious few thereafter) and the lack of any psychologically distinguishing features aside from appearance and behaviour mean that it takes some time to latch on to *Kinetta*'s slow, repetitive rhythms as the film's subjects search for some kind of ritualistic structure and meaning to their otherwise lonely and alienated existence, even if it involves extracting some sort of vicarious pleasure out of violent disruptions to other people's lives. (The reconstructions invariably involve a hotel chambermaid playing a murder victim, a role that takes a psychological toll as she becomes increasingly obsessed with various mechanisms of death.)

With only fleeting glimpses of the dark comedy of Lanthimos's later work, *Kinetta* is a hard film from which to derive much conventional pleasure, but it lodges itself disquietingly in the mind for some time after the end credits roll.

Disc: The transfer is technically faultless, and the extras provide helpful roadmaps. Lanthimos himself contributes a 30-minute Q&A in English. Michael Ewins's booklet essay is particularly valuable for setting the film against a specifically Greek cultural context that a lay viewer would probably miss.

LES MISÉRABLES

Raymond Bernard; France 1934; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Dual Format Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD;



Pinoy portrait: *Independencia*

288 minutes; Certificate PG; 1.37:1; Features: short film ('Le Chemineau'), video essays ('Victor Hugo in Cinema', 'Raymond Chirat'), archival interview, screen tests, deleted scenes, newsreels, theatrical trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Until Criterion's comparatively recent revival-cum-exhumation of some of his films, Raymond Bernard seemed in danger of becoming golden-age French cinema's forgotten man, despite his silent masterpiece *The Chess Player* (1927) getting the full Kevin Brownlow/David Gill/Carl Davis treatment in the 1980s.

On the evidence here, it's very much our loss, as this wholly engrossing adaptation of Victor Hugo's much loved doorstop comprehensively banishes all memories of the musical version, not least thanks to the wealth of detail permitted by a running time more appropriate to a TV miniseries (the film was originally screened in three parts, a viewing option retained here).

Just a few years into France's talkie era, Bernard and cinematographer Jules Kruger (who had shot Abel Gance's similarly dynamic *Napoleon*) achieved a remarkable visual fluidity, most notably using handheld camerawork to thrust the viewer into the heart of the action as the brilliantly choreographed downtrodden masses take to the barricades during the 1832 Paris Uprising. They also concoct a splendidly quasi-gothic expressionism in the treatment of the story of the Thénardiers, the unscrupulous inkeepers after whom the middle film is named. Harry Baur is an appropriately lumpen Jean Valjean, the damage that 19 years of unjust imprisonment has wrought upon his psyche being apparent from his bearing well before the relatively early scene in which he finds himself compelled to snaffle his kindly benefactor's silverware because criminality has seeped into his very essence – a fact not lost on Charles Vanel's obsessive police inspector Javert as he doggedly tracks Valjean's upwardly mobile career into local politics. Meanwhile, the stories of mother and daughter Fantine (Florelle) and Cosette (Josseline Gaël) facilitate much comment on sexual blackmail and the still subservient role of women in supposedly enlightened post-Revolutionary France – if Bernard's film necessarily lacks Hugo's lengthy essays on the various historical and cultural topics raised by the narrative, he's at least able to convey their essence with a visual economy deriving from over a decade in silent cinema.

Disc: Sourced from Pathé's recent 4K restoration.

A few allowances have to be made for the

film's advanced age (some shots betray digital scrubbing) but for the most part it looks terrific. The two-disc set is crammed with numerous new and archival extras sourced from the 2013 French Blu-ray edition but subtitled in English here, including a short silent adaptation of a scene from the novel that predates Bernard's film by three decades.

NEKROMANTIK

Jörg Buttgereit; Germany 1987; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 75 minutes; 1.33:1 Features: soundtrack CD, 'Hot Love' (1985), 'Horror Heaven' (1984), audio commentaries, director's introduction, alternative 'grindhouse version', interview with Buttgereit, documentaries and featurettes, Q&A with Buttgereit recorded in 2014, 'Horror Heaven' trailer featuring outtakes from the film, two Buttgereit-directed music videos, complete collection of Buttgereit feature-film trailers, image gallery

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Robert (Daktari Lorenz), a glum young man who works as part of a crew that clears up after road accidents, brings home portions of human bodies to please his nagging necrophile girlfriend Betty (Beatrice M). When she insists on sharing their bed with a whole corpse, the gruesome *ménage à trois* falls apart. Betty becomes more fixated on her dead lover than the living one... which leads to a gruesome happy ending as Robert takes extreme measures to become her ideal man.

Made outside any conventional film industry, Jörg Buttgereit's *Nekromantik* makes an impression with its imaginatively gruesome homemade effects and willingness to tackle extreme subject matter. Its aesthetic aligns with works such as John Waters's *Pink Flamingos* (1972), Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* (1981) and Peter Jackson's *Bad Taste* (1987), but it has a sombre, German tone of its own. A documentary follows the film's long path to legitimate, authorised distribution from its appearance at the 1988 Shock Around the Clock festival at London's Scala cinema through near-covert VHS releases via channels notionally free of the oversight of censors to this impressive Arrow edition. The package commands respect, though some commentators – and perhaps Buttgereit – wax nostalgic about the days when the film was beyond the pale.

As the title suggests, *Nekromantik* is torn by impulses to be at once gruesome (and depressing or shocking) and romantic (and vaguely underground). Performance, music and effects (including unfaked rabbit-slaughter, a convincing and viscous corpse and an outrageously bogus phallus that spurts semen and blood in a key scene) are all of a piece, crude through necessity or intent yet given to artfilm ambition (the lush piano theme is drilled into the mind by repetition) and not without sly humour.

Disc: This three-disc edition (DVD, Blu-ray and soundtrack CD) threatens to overwhelm the modest achievements of the film with a wealth of extras: multiple documentaries (contemporary and retrospective), a great deal of input from Buttgereit (including a genial commentary track with co-writer

Franz Rodenkirchen and an on-camera interview), a sampling of the director's rock videos and shorts (*Hot Love, Horror Heaven*) and a substantial booklet with writing about the film (and an interview with real-life necrophile Karen Greenlee). The amiable, unpretentious Buttigereit is disarmingly candid about the technical shortcomings of the film, and talks interestingly about the challenges of zero-budget filmmaking in the pre-video era.

THE OTHER

Robert Mulligan; USA 1972; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 100 minutes; Certificate 12; 1.85:1; Features: trailer, booklet with writing by programmer Aaron Hillis, 1972 interview with Robert Mulligan

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

A neglected entry in the 70s cycle of evil-kids horror, Robert Mulligan's *The Other* eschews the Grand Guignol shocks of *The Exorcist* or *The Omen* in favour of a quieter, more insidious brand of menace. (In its understated creepiness, perhaps its closest cousin would be its near-namesake, Alejandro Amenábar's 2001 *The Others*.) The absence of big-name cast members probably didn't help it at the box office either; the nearest it can boast to a star is the respected Broadway actress Uta Hagen, here making her big-screen debut (at age 53) as the folksy old Russian-born grandmother.

The setting is unusual too: mid-1930s rural Connecticut, with the Depression a looming presence in the background. Period colour was one of Mulligan's strengths – witness *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) and *Summer of '42* (1971) – and the sense of a small isolated community, a cluster of farmhouses inhabited by unspecified uncles, aunts, cousins and the



Twin pique: *The Other*

like, is vividly conveyed. *The Other* is an intensely family-focused drama, centring on the pair of twins played by Martin and Chris Udvarynoky – one malicious, the other timid. Nearly all the various grisly fates are suffered by their relatives.

Mulligan, working from a script by Tom Tryon, author of the original novel, plays fair with his audience; you'll probably see the crucial midway reveal coming, but it's fully justified in terms of plot and dialogue. One clue is that while we often see Holland (the bad twin) from his brother Niles's POV, we never get the reverse shot. Using actual twins, rather than double-exposing a single actor, pays off; for all their close resemblance, there are subtle differences in voice tone and bearing between the two boys, which play effectively into their roles. There is shrewdly pointed use of sound too – certain lines of dialogue have a slight echo-haze around them. And whether Niles is possessed, schizoid or plain psychotic is left tantalisingly open right to the end.

Disc: Blu-ray does full justice to the rich deep colours of DP Robert Surtees's photography.



Les Misérables This wholly engrossing adaptation of Victor Hugo's much loved doorstop comprehensively banishes all memories of the musical version

From this source, though, the near-vanilla disc (just a trailer) is a disappointment; an intro, or even better a commentary, could have added much needed context.

FILMS STARRING BURT REYNOLDS

SAM WHISKEY

Arnold Laven; USA 1969; Kino Lorber/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 96 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: 'Lookin' Back with O.W. Bandy'; interview with Clint Walker; original theatrical trailer

WHITE LIGHTNING

Joseph Sargent; USA 1973; Kino Lorber/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 101 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: 'Burt Reynolds: Back to the Bayou Part 1'; original theatrical trailer

GATOR

Burt Reynolds; USA 1976; Kino Lorber/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 2.35:1; Features: 'Burt Reynolds: Back to the Bayou Part 2'; original theatrical trailer

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

While Clint Eastwood's *American Sniper* raises a fracas among critics – and reconfirms its 84-year-old director as a viable box-office force – Burt Reynolds, six years Eastwood's junior, languishes, uncelebrated, in the crepuscular twilight of his career.

It didn't have to be this way. For a time, the two men travelled parallel paths. Without anything like Eastwood's success, Reynolds worked in the so-called spaghetti westerns (1966's *Navajo Joe*) before breaking out as a matinee name. From 1973 to 1984, movie-theatre owners of America voting in the Quigley's International Motion Picture Almanac poll ranked Reynolds among the top ten moneymaking stars. During this stretch, he even showed initiative towards controlling his own career, forming a shortlived production company with his *The Longest Yard* director Robert Aldrich (RoBurt), and beginning to direct himself not long after Eastwood had stepped behind the camera. The results were not without promise, though Reynolds's auteur aspirations were only half fulfilled: reviewing his fine fourth feature *Stick* (1985), critic Dave Kehr acknowledged that the "very personal but almost completely inarticulate" film "follows the pattern of his earlier work".

Kino Lorber's Blu-ray release of three Reynolds films from his rise to power and heyday offer a chance to appraise the reign of this most virile of toupee-wearers. *Sam Whiskey*, Reynolds's first western in which he doesn't play an Indian, is a fairly typical specimen of the mid-to-late-60s vogue for bawdy, laboriously-zany historical roguishness, with Reynolds as a frantic crackabarrel conman, Ossie Davis as his sceptical, laconic right-hand man and Angie Dickinson as a reminder, should any be needed, that director Arnold Laven is no Howard Hawks.

Sam Whiskey gives an early glimpse of Reynolds's fallback persona, a self-amused but sweet-natured bullshitter with a happy contempt for authority figures and a twinkle in his eye. This was Reynolds's gum-snapping, back-talking comfort zone, though you can make a fair case that he was best when he was dragged beyond mere likeability, as in his films with Aldrich, in 1972's *Deliverance*.



Television

GAME OF THRONES, SEASON 4

HBO; USA 2014; Warner Home Video/Region 2 DVD;

550 minutes approximately; 16:9; Features:

cast and crew commentaries

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

We could do with an Empson to write *Some Versions of Medievalism* – to list all the ways we caricature and condescend to our ancestors. Alternatively, you can just skim through George R.R. Martin's fantasies and find most of them enacted there. Four series in, the pleasures of Westeros have palled: what at first seemed like a bracingly anti-romantic version of a medieval society had degenerated by the middle of the third season into a sordid, thinly imagined world overpopulated with sadists and psychopaths, an apparently Machiavellian realism into a motiveless malignity, though without the Shakespearean dimensions that phrase implies.

Even while the maintenance of multiple narratives – the stirring of eldritch forces in the cold north; the rise of usurped princess Daenerys in the east; the personal odysseys and sufferings of the children of House Stark all over the place; and the dynastic manoeuvrings of the Lannisters – remains an extraordinary feat of logistics, the over-concentration on monarchical politics has worn thin: I find myself wondering, repeatedly, how the other half lives. It is not often that a fantasy world leaves me feeling starved of socioeconomic data.

There are signs, though, of a certain loosening in this fourth season, perhaps because Martin's over-baroque plotting and, more recently, his procrastination have at various points forced the scriptwriters to abandon his scheme. The scramble of incident has become less hectic – some episodes, such as the assault by rebels from the north on the great ice wall, take their sweet time, offering an occasional relaxing dip into tedium. And it still offers a fascinating parade of superb British actors, even if they're not always acting superbly, and even if the dispiritingly underused (Peter Vaughan, Diana Rigg, Anton Lesser, Ciarán Hinds) outnumber the genuine discoveries – I'd single out the increasingly mature and plausible Maisie Williams as Arya Stark, tomboy turned unnervingly cool killer; and give a nod, too, to Jerome Flynn's career-reviving turn as a likeably self-aware mercenary.

Disc: The transfers are fine, as you'd expect, though I'm not convinced the commentaries add anything to the experience.

IN SEARCH OF THE DARK AGES

BBC; UK 1981; Simply Media/Region 2 DVD; 352 minutes; 4:3

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

In far-off times, so legend tells, a surprisingly youthful man in a sheepskin jacket and flared trousers came out of the north to conquer the realms of TV historical documentary; and his legacy is all around us today. It's not going too far to say that Michael Wood's *In Search of the Dark Ages*, first broadcast on BBC2 in the early 1980s, transformed the way history is treated on television. Every time you see a historian in casual dress enthusing and gesticulating in a rural landscape or shouting over the whirr of the helicopter he's riding in; every time an archaeologist gets excited on screen about the



Game of Thrones There are signs of a certain loosening in this fourth season... The scramble of incident has become less hectic

new facts brought to light in an excavated car park (and every time an archaeologist fails to mention all the qualifications and uncertainties behind the 'facts'); every time a historical episode is illustrated with shots of yelling armoured horsemen galloping in slow motion towards the camera, or sword-blades glinting in candlelight – then, you're seeing Wood's influence.

That influence hasn't been entirely for the good: narrative drive and a charismatic presenter may help to drive up ratings for dry topics, but there are limits to what viewers can learn. The real irritation, though, is that the style has become so dominant – we have what is practically a monoculture, where less obviously authored, more equivocal treatments of the past have difficulty getting commissioned.

Still, you can hardly blame Wood for being original and popular, and it is good to see his first TV outings again. The series title, *In Search of the Dark Ages*, was attached after the fact. To begin with there were two batches of single documentaries made between 1979 and 1981, each with the prefix *In Search of...*; in chronological order, the subjects were: Boadicea, Arthur, Offa, Alfred the Great, Athelstan, Eric Bloodaxe, Ethelred the Unready and William the Conqueror, which together offer a rough sketch of English (plus odd bits of Welsh and Scottish) history from the Romans to the Normans. The programmes were repeated not long after broadcast but haven't

been issued on DVD before – according to one web-based source I came across, because Wood's versions of history have been superseded by later discoveries and interpretations. (It's worth noting that Wood, these days professor of public history at Manchester University, has been fighting back, defending his contention that the site of the battle of Brunanburh, Athelstan's decisive victory over Norse-Scottish forces, was in South Yorkshire.)

Its archaeological value may be uncertain, but the series remains informative and absorbing – Wood has a talent for driving a point home, for turning sketchy, uncertain narrative into drama; his voice, almost Dylan Thomas-like in its hammy resonance, remains unique. In any case, the programmes have their own historical fascination: Wood's oatmeal three-piece suit with pale grey tie, in the Boadicea programme, is by itself a revelation of period sensibility; the sight of his flares flapping against the willowherb evocative of a style of Englishness that seems to have died out. Less charmingly, the stark predominance of male voices transports us closer to the Dark Ages than you might like.

The photography is often impressive, and the mostly electronic score (no composer credited) is at times brilliant, shifting from *Doctor Who*-style eeriness to John Carpenter jitteriness – a CD of the soundtrack (someone, please?) would render the entire Ghost Box retro-sensibility obsolete.

Discs: A nice crisp transfer – it was shot on film, not videotape, and it shows. ☺

New releases

► which made him a star, and in 1973's *White Lightning*, which introduced him in the role of Arkansas moonshiner Gator McClusky, here sprung from prison to reluctantly go undercover for the state and nail the crooked sheriff and Dixie mafia cronies responsible for his kid brother's death. Director Joseph Sargent, a genre utility man who died in December last year leaving this and *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* (1974) as his enduring legacies, wrings genuine pathos out of Burt, while the movie derives further veracity from its lived-in backwoods locations, gallery of swamp-trash faces and ace American character actors (Bo Hopkins, R.G. Armstrong and Ned Beatty as the sheriff).

Reynolds evidently found the proceedings too grim, because he set about dismantling Sargent's good work for his directorial debut, 1976's corny, pandering semi-sequel *Gator*, which detaches the material from any semblance of social reality and domesticates McClusky by matching him with a tomboy daughter and a crusty-coot pappy. But don't close the book on the Burt Reynolds renaissance just yet: his 1981 *Sharky's Machine* is due from Kino in the spring.

Disc: High-detail transfers that preserve original grain, so you can search for a wig seam to no avail.

SAFE

Todd Haynes; USA 1995; Criterion Collection/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 119 minutes/1.85:1; Features: commentary by Haynes, Julianne Moore and producer Christine Vachon, new retrospective conversation between Haynes and Moore, Vachon interview, Haynes's early short film 'The Suicide'

Reviewed by Charlie Fox

An end-of-the-century anxiety dream – toxic clouds, inexplicable fits and all – *Safe* is Todd Haynes's sinister masterpiece, discreetly joining the industrial uncanniness of Don DeLillo's *White Noise* to the ominous inertia of Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* and conjuring a film that's an unmatched account of contemporary dread.

Set in the twilight of the Reagan 1980s, it follows Los Angeles housewife Carol (a spooked and captivating Julianne Moore), who inhabits her body like a bewildered ghost and slowly succumbs to a mysterious condition called 'environmental illness', which is marked by crippling psychosomatic sensitivity to the chemicals that suffuse the modern world. The film proceeds at a drugged pulse: her symptoms manifest, alienation intensifies and treatment commences, with every phase signalling a further withdrawal from the outside world. (The suburbs and a quarantine site in the wilderness are drenched in the same ambient gloom.) As ever, Haynes is performing an elegant formal subversion, making you gaze through the meticulously arranged surface to find the critical depths concealed within, as cinematic traditions are invoked and unsettled.

But *Safe* remains so purposefully opaque and densely recessed with echoes of various modern panics that its final substance is difficult to pinpoint. The special horror it induces comes from an eerie capacity to tolerate all sorts of feverish interpretations without ever yielding a definite meaning. Follow the menacing hints and it becomes less a ghoulishly vivid



Before... Before...: Two for the Road

psychodrama to be watched in the shadow of AIDS, or a haunting critique of the hysterical conventions surrounding films on female illness, than a study of the spectral fears about toxicity and infection that underpin our responses to any form of otherness. The final scene of Moore, ravaged yet ecstatic and staring into the mirror, has been much examined (what do you see?), but the whole film shivers with a deep disquiet that, two decades on, refuses to go away.

Disc: Among the extras is *The Suicide*, a long-lost short directed by a teenage Haynes that collects many of his subsequent obsessions into a manic stream-of-consciousness story about a lonely boy.

TOOTSIE

Sydney Pollack; USA 1982; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray and Region 1 DVD Dual Format; 116 minutes; 2.40:1; Features: audio commentary by Sydney Pollack, new interviews with Dustin Hoffman and Phil Rosenthal, two 'Tootsie' documentary features, screen and wardrobe tests, deleted scenes

Reviewed by Dan Callahan

Years in development, *Tootsie* bears the marks of many different talents all converging to make a more or less accepted classic comedy about gender and acting. Dustin Hoffman is billed twice in the end credits, first as middle-aged struggling actor Michael Dorsey and then as Dorothy Michaels, the woman Dorsey pretends to be in order to get a much needed job on a TV soap opera, and his furiously thoughtful work fully merits that separation. The irony that the difficult Dorsey can only find an outlet for his stubborn male temperament in Dorothy's feminist rabble-rousing is so unstressed that it doesn't even seem to have been noticed, but simpler pleasures prevail. The ultimate Actors Studio actor, Dorsey needs to be playing a part nearly all the time in order to finally make a mainstream impact, and it is this concept that the movie happily embraces.

It might seem churlish to point out the compositional ungainliness of Sydney Pollack's direction and the gracelessness of some of his staging, but *Tootsie* overrides these liabilities through the sheer inventiveness of its central star performance and its highly charged ensemble, which includes Bill Murray at his improvisational best as Dorsey's roommate, Teri Garr in a tizzy as his neurotic friend and lover, and Jessica Lange as the spacey dream-girl bombshell he falls for hard.

Like most expert farces, *Tootsie* takes a while to get going, builds up a fine head

of steam and gently winds back down. It isn't perfect, but then, as Joe E. Brown says at the end of *Some Like It Hot*, nobody is.

Disc: The extras are mainly carry-overs from other DVD releases, but they do highlight early footage of Hoffman playing a very different sort of serious-actress version of Dorothy with the film's original director, Hal Ashby, making you wonder just what *Tootsie* might have become if the softer, more exploratory Ashby had remained at the helm.

TWO FOR THE ROAD

Stanley Donen; UK 1967; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 111 minutes; Certificate PG; 2.35:1; Features: commentary by Donen, interview with Frederic Raphael, trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

"They don't look very happy," remarks Joanna Wallace (Audrey Hepburn), observing a pair of young newlyweds. "Why should they?" retorts her husband Mark (Albert Finney). "They just got married."

The acerbic exchange that opens *Two for the Road* sets the tone for the whole movie; it shows us a relationship that's fragmenting – and shows it in fragments, slipping agilely back and forth across 12 years from initial meeting to a marriage that's headed for the rocks. In some ways Stanley Donen's film anticipates Richard Linklater's *Before... trilogy* – and ends, like the third of Linklater's films, with a hard-won, precarious sliver of optimism. Joanna and Mark's relationship may survive, but we're not being offered any guarantees.

Donen trained as a dancer before helming some of the classic Hollywood musicals of the MGM/Arthur Freed era – *On the Town*, *Singin' in the Rain*, *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* and more – and there's a dancing lightness about the way *Two for the Road* cuts, or sometimes zip-pans, between five different journeys taken by the couple from England to the Riviera. The modes of transport let us know which time zone we're in at any given moment, as well as marking their increasing affluence: hitchhiking, sharing an American couple's station wagon, a beaten-up old MG (which eventually bursts into flames), a snazzy red Triumph roadster, a white Mercedes convertible.

Frederic Raphael's script likewise deftly straddles the lines between comedy and drama, with casual banter from one era often taking on poignant overtones when recalled. Nothing we've shown should be taken as 'the past', Donen stresses in his voiceover commentary: "All sequences are the present." A few quirks of 60s-style moviemaking have dated: zooms are way too frequent, the American couple (Eleanor Bron and William Daniels) with their bratty little daughter are crudely caricatured, and two bursts of speeded-up motion are gratingly unfunny. That apart, though, *Two for the Road* still feels fresh and astringent, with potent chemistry between Hepburn and Finney. Hepburn once cited this as the film she felt proudest of; it's not hard to see why.

Disc: The largely location shoot comes up with vivid immediacy on Blu-ray, and Raphael contributes a lively interview in fluent French.

Lost and found

LAUGHTER IN THE DARK

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

Transposed to the swinging 60s, Nabokov's tale of despair, deceit and sexual humiliation makes poignant, painful viewing

By Noel Hess

"Once upon a time there lived in Berlin, Germany, a man called Albinus. He was rich, respectable, happy; one day, he abandoned his wife for the sake of a youthful mistress; he loved; was not loved; and his life ended in disaster."

So begins Vladimir Nabokov's 1932 novel, originally published in Russian under the title *Kamera Obscura*, then translated by the author into English as *Laughter in the Dark* and filmed by Tony Richardson in 1969. In the collection of Nabokov adaptations to date – *Lolita* (1962, 1997), *King, Queen, Knave* (1972), *Despair* (1978), *The Luzhin Defence* (2000) – *Laughter in the Dark* is the least known, though in many ways one of the more successful. Nabokov's filigree prose does not translate easily to cinematic form, and yet the adaptation by Richardson and his writer Edward Bond is well worth rediscovering.

It has been an extremely difficult film to see. Apparently no print exists in this country or America, it has not been shown on British TV for at least 30 years, and has never been available on DVD anywhere. No masterpiece, but vivid and memorable, with a striking central performance by Nicol Williamson.

Williamson was an actor not well used by cinema. His best performances tend to be in one of two keys: simmering violence waiting to erupt, as in the two films he made with Jack Gold, *The Bofors Guns* (1968) and *The Reckoning* (1970), or comic-melancholic – *Robin and Marian* (1976), *Excalibur* (1981). His casting in *Laughter in the Dark* – as a weak and unhappy man who is helplessly in love with a cinema usherette, and who loses his family and his sight and is cruelly cuckolded (literally) under his nose – is both against type and happened rather by accident, and yet he manages a reading of the part that's painful and poignant.

Richardson tells the story, in his autobiography, of how Richard Burton was originally cast in the role (Albinus here becomes Sir Edward More, a Lord Clark-esque art historian and presenter of art documentaries) but was fired after two weeks' shooting. Burton was "hours late", "sneered at the script" and was "degrading and miserable to work with". The Burton/Taylor media circus was also a constant distraction and interference. It may be that Burton knew he was miscast and wanted out. Certainly it is difficult to see how he could have found the degree of masochistic pathos that Williamson achieves.

Where Nabokov's novel is a comedy of sexual manners, Richardson and Bond play their account as a modern-day version of the cruellest Restoration comedy imaginable. This is clearly



Cruel fate: Nicol Williamson and Anna Karina

Tony Richardson and Edward Bond play it as a modern-day version of the cruellest Restoration comedy imaginable

signalled by a baroque score (Raymond Leppard arrangements of Monteverdi) and a credit sequence of a country house in long shot. We are primed for a period film, and then surprised by the first scene, in a contemporary setting, in which a rather distracted and preoccupied More is in the garden with his family – not the "happy man" of Nabokov's introduction but one already infatuated with Margot (Anna Karina). We soon discover that he is in a sexless marriage (to Siân Phillips), has a young daughter, and a brother-in-law (Peter Bowles) who provides the film (and novel) with a moral centre. Margot is in fact in love with her art-forger boyfriend Herve (Jean-Claude Drouot), who encourages

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



'The needle-sharp torture of Nabokov's final sequences has been unforgivably blunted... it fails in creating the slightest interest in its trio of repulsive characters. Nabokov deals with weakness and makes it real, human and tragic. Richardson deals with concupiscence and renders it tedious'

Philip Strick 'Monthly Film Bulletin', September 1969

her to play along with More. After leaving his family for Margot, and suffering the death of his daughter, More loses his sight in a car accident.

The final third of the film has More, blind and dependent on Margot, in residence in a villa in Spain, in which Margot has imported, unbeknown to More, her lover Herve. This is in some ways the most interesting part of the film, and indeed Richardson said that it was the cruelty that most attracted him to the project. It is certainly in the novel, but is perhaps accentuated by Bond, who was after all a prime exponent of the 'Theatre of Cruelty' movement and who, one suspects, may have relished a scenario in which the upper classes are sexually humiliated.

It does, however, make painful viewing. One wonders if this section of the film can be read as the enactment of an Oedipal fantasy of a helpless, impotent child excluded from a couple engaged in more or less continuous and tormenting intercourse (Herve even symbolically dangles his penis in More's face). The ending retains Nabokov's comic absurdity of a blind man attempting to shoot his faithless lover, but adds an extra twist by suggesting this to be as much suicide as homicide. Given the burden of guilt More carries for the destruction of his family and death of his child ("It's a judgement on me," he mutters), this reading seems plausible. Nabokov's rather brilliant title cleverly hints at despair, mockery and sexual humiliation, all of which are recurrent motifs in the film.

The weak link is Karina, who is given precious little to do apart from being sexually irresistible and empty-headed. She does what she can with a cipher of a part, and is not helped by an accent that veers from French to cod cockney. *Laughter in the Dark* tends to be remembered – and dismissed – as a swinging 60s film, but blessedly that aspect is restricted to an obligatory party scene (in which Hockney makes a brief appearance).

The film's reception in this country seems to have been entirely negative. This journal dismissed it as "spoiled by miscalculation and miscasting", though conceding that "the bizarre cruelty retains some of its original compulsion". *Monthly Film Bulletin* judged it "tedious" and "heavy-handed". Not so. More's plight and eventual fate would not be so uncomfortable to watch if this were true.

Should it be possible to disentangle the copyright issues that seem to have made *Laughter in the Dark* unavailable for the past 30 years, a DVD release would be most welcome, and would enhance Williamson's undervalued reputation as a film actor. It would also be a fascinating addition to Richardson's admittedly rather uneven body of work. Despite its flaws, it is more than just another variation on the old 'love is blind' theme. It is a film with the courage of its convictions. §

i *Laughter in the Dark* screens at BFI Southbank on 16 February

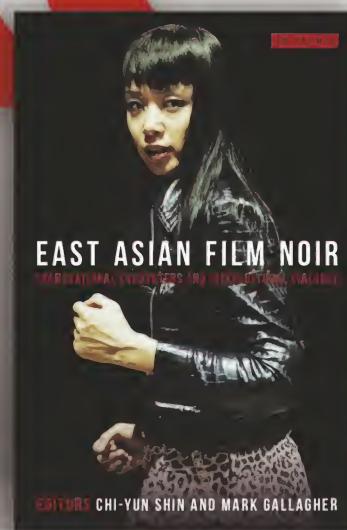
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SILENT RUNNING

By Mark Kermode, BFI Publishing/
Palgrave, 88pp, paperback, illustrated.
£12.99, ISBN 978184578320
A visually stunning and heartfelt riposte to the emotional sterility of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Douglas Trumbull's eco-themed *Silent Running* (1972) became one of the defining science-fiction films of the 70s. Mark Kermode, writing on his favourite science-fiction film of all time, traces Trumbull's sentimental masterpiece from its roots in the counter-culture of the 60s to its enduring appeal as a cult classic in the 21st century. Drawing on a new interview with Trumbull, Kermode examines both the technical and thematic elements of this uniquely moving space adventure, which continues to be mirrored and imitated by filmmakers today.

<http://bit.ly/1uMrSof>

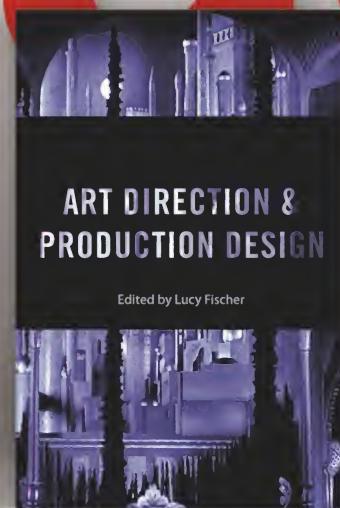


EAST ASIAN FILM NOIR

Transnational Encounters and Intercultural Dialogue

Edited by Chi-Yun Shin & Mark Gallagher; Tauris World Cinema series; 288pp; hardback, £62, ISBN 9781780760087; paperback, £15.99, ISBN 9781780760094
Film noir has been understood as a genre exclusive to Hollywood. But classical US *noir*'s downbeat sensibility also finds expression in later films from Japan, South Korea, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. This is the first book to explore those films and the filmmakers who made them. Looking at a range of examples from the 1950s to the present – including *The Crimson Kimono*, *Ghost in the Shell* and *Rebels of the Neon God* – this work conceptualises and articulates an internationally situated 'East Asian film noir'. In doing so, it raises fascinating questions around the politics of representation, authorial activity, genre, and local and cross-cultural reception.

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ART DIRECTION & PRODUCTION DESIGN

Edited by Lucy Fischer



QUATERMASS AND THE PIT

By Kim Newman, BFI Publishing/
Palgrave, 112pp, paperback, illustrated.
£12.99, ISBN 9781844577910
Before *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Doctor Who*, *Quatermass and the Pit* was the paramount British science-fiction saga in film and television. Kim Newman's fascinating study focuses on Roy Ward Baker's 1967 film, written by *Quatermass* creator Nigel Kneale for Hammer Films, but also looks at the origins of the *Quatermass* franchise in 1950s BBC serials and earlier films. Exploring the production and reception of the film and series, Newman assesses the lasting importance of this landmark franchise. One of nine brand new BFI Film Classics offering fascinating explorations of key science-fiction films.

<http://bit.ly/1uMrSof>



That's entertainment: Bob Hope made his film debut in *The Big Broadcast of 1938* (above right), but also triumphed in radio, TV and live performance

ROAD TO HOPE

HOPE: ENTERTAINER OF THE CENTURY

By Richard Zoglin, Simon & Schuster, 565pp.
\$30, ISBN 9781439140277

Reviewed by David Thomson

If you hurry, it could still be yours. The 'home' in Palm Springs that John Lautner designed for Bob Hope and his wife Dolores is available. It's 23,366 square feet, on 6.2 acres of irrigated desert, with ten bedrooms and 13 bathrooms, with pools in the fireplaces and wisecracks on the toilet paper. Its modernist concrete canopy is an arc that mimics the mountains nearby – it was *not* modelled on Bob's nose. This unique opportunity comes for \$24,999 million. OK, wise guy – that is

a knockdown offer from the first asking of \$50 million. Look, we're talking Bob Hope!

If I've slipped into realtor poetry, I've been reading Richard Zoglin's biography of Hope in which he begins by saying Bob was not just the entertainer of the century – 1903 to 2003, a tidy life ending at 100 plus a couple of months – but "the *only* important entertainer". Bigger than Chaplin, the Beatles, Sinatra, Madonna...? It's a slippery slope and one that soon leaves us asking what a great entertainer might be? Probe too far and you may bump up against 'entertainment' itself. What is that, and the society that has to have it? It's the old conundrum from *Sullivan's Travels*: if you're on the Southern chain gang does a little Disney help? With the Feinstein report on CIA torture on the front pages, can any new movie sweeten that horror?

Such doubts do not cloud Zoglin's vision.

He knows – and he has the numbers to prove it – that Bob Hope (once known as Leslie from Eltham, and then Bristol) was a phenomenon and a treasure. He triumphed in vaudeville, radio, movies, television and live performance. He was a good golfer, too. He hosted the Oscars 18 times and never gave up on his Passover joke – that was what happened at the Hope house every Oscar season. Yet Bob did get Academy respect: he was given five honorary Oscars.

For decades Hope prevailed, like every cliché about 'hope' keeping us going. It was not that Bob was short on cynicism and calculation, but he was blessed by luck and timing. He had a breakthrough in 1938 in a movie debut in which he sang 'Thanks for the Memory'. He fell into the *Road* pictures with Bing Crosby and Dorothy Lamour, and then he laboured in remote and dangerous places to entertain

the troops. He did 57 USO tours in his life. Yes, he had a platoon of joke-writers and pretty women a lot of the time, but he was honest amusement for a just war and he had better rapport with the troops than generals. They loved him, and for decades Bob Hope was sultan of that nostalgia, an entertainer as caught in the routine of doing himself as Archie Rice.

But he lived too long (and Zoglin understands this). The USO routine went on because the US ensured that American troops were always stationed somewhere, in peril and sacrifice. Hope had seen that reality personally; he had been moved by the service and reached out to the guys. But in time he believed his routine was reality, and he struggled to ignore a ruinous cultural clash over Vietnam. He went there every Christmas with Les Brown's band, sidekick Jerry Colonna, the writers and any female star who needed the exposure, and he assumed it was still a just and Hopeful war. The TV specials made from the tours had huge ratings at home.

Zoglin suggests Hope seized on Vietnam – the military had been growing critical of the tours' cost in the late 50s. But this was real war again. So, the old jokes were relaunched, and he was often very funny. "I asked Secretary McNamara if we could come here," he told some guys at a shattered outpost in 1965. "He said, 'Why not, we've tried everything else.'" But some servicemen did not share in his archaic assumptions. They turned on Bob and let him know their war was without faith or hope. He never got this lesson, and so in his mind he huddled closer to authority pals like Spiro Agnew and Richard Nixon. (He wrote some lines for Agnew speeches.)

He flinched when he was booed; he was sometimes scared for real, instead of trading on cowardice as he had in *The Paleface*, a film that helped make him the number one box-office attraction for 1949 (with Korea and television as opportunities coming up on the horizon).

Of course, he had reason to be a conservative. The Hope family had never been penniless. They sailed to America with two cabins in steerage when Bob was nearly five and they went to live in Cleveland where he did this and that, with spells in reform school and some boxing contests. You can see a rascal in his alert eyes then. He was good-looking, a sly joker and a lifelong womaniser (the book never persuades us he was in love). What a role he could have made for Cary Grant: they were only a year apart and there was a moment when they both lived in Bristol. Archie Leach was poorer, and possessed of a different talent. But Bob made it big time. He was business shrewd, putting his money into property: acres of land in the Santa Monica mountains waiting for development. He would become maybe the richest man in Hollywood, with an estimated net worth of \$200 million in the 1960s.

Zoglin's book exults in the success of the career, though I'm not sure Hope had as much romantic respect for success as Zoglin feels. But the best thing in the book is how the 'Thanks for the Memory' song worked in *The Big Broadcast of 1938*. It had been written by Leo Robin and Ralph Rainger. The film's director,



Bob Hope was good-looking, a sly joker and a lifelong womaniser. What a role he could have made for Cary Grant

Mitchell Leisen, thought he could work with it. He told Hope, "Try to think through your eyes." The song was a duologue for a divorced couple, stirred by regret and fond recollections, to be played by Hope and Shirley Ross. Zoglin calls it "one of the most beautifully written and performed musical numbers in all of movies", and he illuminates that with a phrase-by-phrase account of the performance. It was grown up, worthy of Lubitsch, Renoir – and the still undervalued Leisen. The song made Hope a star and outlived the film. He took it as his theme, and it lasted till the end of his career, but he ignored its most valuable insight: that there could have been an actor in Bob Hope. One reminder of that is *That Certain Feeling* (1956), and his character's relationship with another ex-wife (Eva Marie Saint).

So the *Road* films – *Singapore, Zanzibar, Morocco, Utopia* and *Rio*, between 1940 and 1947 – are vaudeville movies as opposed to authentic comedies of feeling (like things Preston Sturges was doing at the same Paramount). But they



Flawed hero: *Road to Utopia*

are often very funny, surreal in their talking to the camera, and as blessed by black and white as the Astaire-Rogers musicals. Hope and Crosby were perfect flawed heroes for soldiers. They idealised the rivalrous banter of buddies anxious to bury fear and loneliness. The two guys looking at Dorothy Lamour were like a Prewitt (*From Here to Eternity*), too timid to do more than gaze on a wartime whore.

Who made the *Road* films? It's a question beyond answer when the factory system and the war's needs churned out fun like K-rations and ammo. Victor Schertzinger was first in a line of different directors. Buddy DeSylva seems to have been there as a producer – he's on *Sullivan's Travels*, too. There was a shifting gang of writers, the studio and the trio of performers. And there was the mood of the moment and its refusal to examine its own notion of what 'entertainment' needed to be. Did the films make themselves, and is that verdict so far from the panache of *Casablanca*, that other imaginary foray to a place called Morocco? In fact, *Road to Morocco* outgrossed the Best Picture winner for 1943.

At 565 pages, yet short on pictures, this book can be a grind to read – partly because showbiz scrapbooks date fast, but also because Zoglin is too zealous a fan to leave stuff out. So we get a lot like this: "He was named honorary mayor of Chicago and hosted a TV special for the Boy Scouts' new Explorer program. He set attendance records almost everywhere ... from the Canadian National Exposition in 1957 to a concert at the Lubbock Coliseum in 1958, the biggest one-nighter in the city's history. He told his publicist Mack Millar to make inquiries about getting him a Congressional Gold Medal ... for his work entertaining the troops. When the White House initially turned down the request [JFK caved in in 1963], explaining that it would be unfair to single out Hope when so many other entertainers had done their share, Hope told Millar (without irony) to try for the Nobel Peace Prize."

The self-deprecation of his act rarely intruded on the self-aggrandising. Just as Bob had resisted the challenge of becoming an actor, so he seemed cut off from introspection. A lot of the cracks were funny enough to carry you along until the next one, and Bob had speed and wit to inspire his writers. But there's a loss of character in that wisecracking scheme. The monotony is grating, and the voice became whining but smug, far from the wistful tone of 'Thanks for the Memory'. We are no longer content to be rocked by the zingers. We prefer the inside idea of some Art Rosencrantz and Mort Guldenstern desperate in the small hours to come up with enough fresh one-liners to feed the remorseless machine.

Bob Hope can seem a curiosity today – how many young people look at the *Road* films? Whereas Astaire, Sinatra, Louis Armstrong, Judy Garland and Cary Grant are haunting. Yes, those stars lasted for a shorter time than Hope, but something of grace or passion in them calls into being the larger matter of what entertainment is, do we deserve it, and what happens if the entertainer goes on and on... until the wisecracks seem like fissures? **S**

SILENT RUNNING

By Mark Kermode, BFI/Palgrave, BFI Film Classics, 88pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781844578320

Reviewed by Barry Keith Grant

As an avid, near-lifelong fan, Mark Kermode would seem to be the perfect choice for writing the BFI Film Classics monograph on Douglas Trumbull's environmentally conscious science-fiction film *Silent Running* (1972), a key but somewhat critically neglected countercultural entry from the New Hollywood period. As Kermode confesses at the outset, "To be clear: *Silent Running* is not a film about which I can be dispassionate. Having lived for so many years in the company of its characters, its music, its legacy, I have long since parted company with anything approaching critical distance." This is a curious confession in a volume of film criticism, but it does explain why his approach is mostly adulterated rather than analytical.

The book begins with Kermode's account of his apparently primal encounter with the film as an impressionable nine-year-old, then goes on to provide a fascinating account of how the various players and elements involved in its production came together. Here Kermode's obsession with the film (he has collected *Silent Running* memorabilia for 40 years) serves him well. He interviewed director and special-effects

expert Trumbull at length twice, the meetings separated by more than a decade, giving him enough inside knowledge to explain how the film's impressive effects were done – all, remarkably, on a budget of just over \$1 million.

Kermode teases out a number of astonishing ironies of the film's production. The biggest of these is that this tree-hugging, rather than face-hugging, science-fiction movie about the attempt to save the Earth's dying flora in domed spaceships sustaining various ecosystems was shot almost entirely in the constraining interiors of an aircraft carrier that had recently been mothballed after service in the Vietnam War, where it played its part in the dropping of the defoliant Agent Orange. We also learn that Dow Chemical, the primary supplier of Agent Orange, helpfully provided the plastic for the futuristic tetrahedron cargo containers, free of charge.

Discussing the opening tracking shot that moves in loving close-up across plants, "petals dappled with dew", Kermode observes lyrically that when the camera also passes some small animals and comes to focus on Freeman Lowell (Bruce Dern), it places him as "another animal

Bruce Dern may have given 'Silent Running' its engagingly human face, but it is the Drones who provide its fluttering heart



Space odyssey: *Silent Running*

amidst the wilds of nature". This point is crucial to the vision of *Silent Running*, and one wishes Kermode had provided more instances of such interpretive acumen instead of emphasising the film's technical achievements. At the same time, however, Kermode points out the problems of the film's science fictional premise without dwelling on them because he understands that *Silent Running*'s charm and meaning ultimately reside in the subtle but expressive physicality of the Drones – Huey, Dewey and Louie – and the actors playing them. As Kermode so rightly puts it: "Dern may have given *Silent Running* its engagingly human face, but it is the Drones who provide its fluttering heart." S

THE GRIERSON EFFECT

Tracing Documentary's International Movement

Edited by Zoe Druick and Deane Williams; Palgrave; 272pp; £60, hardback, ISBN 9781844575404; £24.99, paperback, ISBN 9781844575398

Reviewed by Scott Anthony

Several months ago Mark Cousins made a short film addressed to John Grierson, part of an attempt to right the wrongs of the documentary canon (as he sees them). It was an endeavour that typified Grierson's fate. At best, he helped put the documentary form on a long and hard road to self-knowledge. At worst, his influence serves as a proxy for all manner of aesthetic, ideological and sociopolitical sins: the provider of documentary cinema's apple-in-the-garden moment.

Kudos then to *The Grierson Effect*, a new collection of essays that at least tries to stretch discussion of Grierson and his influence on to wider canvases. Included in this collection of essays are attempts to address Grierson's lesser-known legacy, from Denmark to Japan via Latin America. The ways in which the Griersonian project were tied in to the British Empire, and what the process of decolonisation did to that project, are also thoroughly thought through. Essays here overlap suggestively with recent volumes on colonial cinema edited by Colin MacCabe and Lee Grieveson.

It's a fine undertaking, although exactly how you trace the Grierson effect, even what that effect actually is, proves far from straightforward. His legacy is complex and multifaceted (activist, producer, administrator and more) and lots of aspects of his work are not covered here at all.

This is probably inevitable with a multi-authored volume of survey essays, but it is the case that the essays in this book – geographically and temporally spaced – tend to dissipate the effect that is supposed to be the object of study rather than bringing it into sharper definition.

What if Grierson is not the originator of documentary but simply an interesting figure in a far older history of nonfiction film?



Activist, producer, administrator: John Grierson

Like a dour version of the opening of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, over the course of his career the night-school teacher and civil servant John Grierson bewilderingly morphed into a substantial media theorist and nonfiction film mogul. A failure to account for how the bureaucratic bone became an industry starship is one of the major gaps in the book. It's fine to argue (as one essay does) that the Griersonian mode of representation was tied in to a dogmatic notion of authenticity, but there is no recognition that this mode of representation was actually part of a much larger approach to the construction of facts, ideas and social reality that did not begin and end with Grierson, or even film.

In the book's weakest essays, exploring the Grierson effect simply becomes a way of restaging a far less interesting series of scholarly gripes about Grierson himself. Sometimes contributors accuse him and his acolytes of not being particularly effective (this tends to be the case in richer countries that now have a well-developed media sphere); sometimes he is accused of distorting local initiatives because he is too effective (usually in poorer countries with a less well-developed media-sphere). The Grierson project, which brought film into the service of democracy but was far from democratic, remains too modernist for postmodernist tastes.

Plenty of intriguing material is excavated in this varied collection of essays, but the book tends to revisit familiar ways of thinking about it. The opportunity is there to do more. What if Grierson is not the originator of documentary but simply an interesting figure in a far longer and far older history of nonfiction film? Getting at the cause may make tracing the 'effect' a more subtle enterprise than simply passing judgement on a particular ideology or mode of representation. The Grierson effect might actually amount to more than the ongoing restaging of documentary's fall. S

REX INGRAM

Visionary Director of the Silent Screen

By Ruth Barton, University Press of Kentucky, 320pp, \$40, ISBN 9780813147093

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

"Why can't everybody be Rex Ingram?" asked a smitten *Picture-Play* review of *The Prisoner of Zenda* in 1922. The critic may have had dollar-signs as well as love hearts in his pupils: Ingram's work was idiosyncratic, but it was both artistic and accessible. And for a few precious years, these traits made his films box-office gold: he directed prestige pictures that filled cinemas and inspired his Hollywood peers. His renown spread beyond the film business too – James Joyce dropped his name into *Finnegans Wake*, and his eclectic set of friends included F. Scott Fitzgerald and T.E. Lawrence.

So this captivating biography of the man born Reginald Hitchcock in the early 1890s in Ireland, is the tale of a director who conquered Hollywood, then turned his back on it. It's the story of how his sculptor's eye made his movies into great works of art, and how that same artistic spirit led him away from Los Angeles to France and North Africa; from his Protestant upbringing, to Islam. It spans continents and contains a cast of glamorous faces. If it were to be filmed, one would surely have to hire Rex Ingram. But Ruth Barton's *Rex Ingram: Visionary Director of the Silent Screen* is more level-headed than a Hollywood biopic. This is a scrupulous book: passionate about the work, dismissive of speculation.

Adventurous but not as academic as was hoped, the rector's son travelled to America in 1911. After working as a messenger on the New Haven docks, he enrolled at Yale to study sculpture. During this time he was knocked out by his first D.W. Griffith film, *Man's Genesis* (1912), and formed a nickelodeon habit that would lead him to what became his career. He dropped out and became a mostly bad actor, then a more successful scenario writer at the Fox studio in New York, where he adopted his mother's maiden name and learned to combine

dramatic pace with his pictorial vision. He talked himself into a directing gig at Universal in Fort Lee – and soon began to achieve critical acclaim and develop his own distinctive style. It was here that he first filled his sets with 'authentic' faces to fill in behind the pulchritudinous stars: bruisers or grotesques that Ingram's later apprentice Michael Powell would refer to as his "court of oddballs". The prettiness of Ingram's films would always be sharpened this way.

On the west coast, working for Metro, Ingram met the three people who would be instrumental to his most famous film, the anti-war drama *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921): screenwriter June Mathis, cinematographer John F. Seitz and star Rudolph Valentino. With these allies, Ingram achieved his aim of making a film with "something of the mellow mezzotint of the painting; to get the fidelity of photography, but the softness of the old master... to give it some of the merit of art." Barton lingers over the making of that overwrought but sublime film – it was a fascinating, and expensive, process. Even though the smouldering tango scene was



Dramatic pace and pictorial vision: Rex Ingram

This captivating biography is the tale of a director who conquered Hollywood, then turned his back on it

a rerun from one of his earlier films, it benefited from days of rehearsal for Ingram and the cast, and preparation for Seitz. Ingram worked closely with Seitz, his own grounding as a sculptor helping him to think in three dimensions, lighting close-ups with a "stereoscopic quality".

Seitz would remain with Ingram for most of the rest of his career, but it was his leading lady who lasted the distance: Alice Terry was a nervous actress whom Ingram met while he was still just about married to his first wife. Terry and Ingram wed in 1921 and she acted in almost all of his films from that point on; she may well have directed much of his last. It seems unlikely that their love life was as satisfactory as their working relationship but Barton is reluctant to gossip: the marriage may have been open, but it was largely happy and supportive.

After just a few years in LA, Ingram was as disenchanted with Western civilisation as he was frustrated by the Hollywood studio system. He travelled to North Africa and then took himself and his career to France. In luxurious exile on the Riviera he continued to make films for MGM, including the sumptuous spy drama *Mare Nostrum* (1926). After a final breach with the studio in 1927, Ingram devoted himself to sculpture and writing, wanderlust, and eventually to Islam. He came out of retirement to make two more films, the second of which was his only talkie, *Baroud* (1932), which he starred in and which was shot in his beloved Morocco.

Barton's biography celebrates a director of brilliance and great influence whose name was already obscure at the time of his death in 1950. *Horsemen* remains a silent cinema set text, feted as Valentino's breakthrough; this book is a sharp reminder that its director's name should be at least as renowned as its leading man's. Otherwise, we are left with an unhappy ending that only Ingram could make palatable. ☀

ALTMAN

By Kathryn Reed Altman and Giulia d'Agnolo Vallan, Abrams, 336pp, \$40, hardback, ISBN 9781419707773

Reviewed by David Thompson

"Underneath all that ego was essentially a very good heart" is screenwriter Jules Feiffer's verdict. The actress Lily Tomlin found him "a benign patriarch". These reflections on Robert Altman appear in a lavishly illustrated celebration of the man who shook up Hollywood with his anarchic, subversive spirit, exploding established genres like the war film (*M.A.S.H.*), the thriller (*The Long Goodbye*), the musical (*Nashville*), even the British costume drama (*Gosford Park*).

All this is well documented in a straight narrative of Altman's career and witty testimonies from various collaborators. But the real spine of this book is his wife Kathryn's personal record of their life together, commenting on photos from the albums she kept over their 47 years of marriage. As Julian Fellowes observes, "Her



Anarchic, subversive spirit: Robert Altman

Wherever Altman filmed, his family went with him, and it feels at times that life with 'Bob' was one extended party

work was to make his work happen." Wherever Altman filmed, his family went with him, and it feels at times that life with 'Bob' was one extended party, usually with a little pot on hand.

Mixing up reality and fiction, a fondness for interwoven stories and large casts, the deployment of a roaming zoom lens and multi-track sound mix – all these elements formed a trademark style that can truly be called 'Altmanesque'. In his introduction, Martin Scorsese reflects on how Altman's development outside Hollywood (making industrial films and over 100 hours of popular television) contributed to his anti-establishment attitude.

While actors adored his openness, writers had a tougher time dealing with his irreverent attitude to screenplays. Garrison Keillor – whose radio show was the basis of Altman's farewell film, *A Prairie Home Companion* – reminds us of the director's wartime experiences on dangerous bombing missions in a B-24 Liberator, noting that "once you've flown in this screaming-loud, freezing cold, cramped boxcar in the sky, with people shouting at you, then what do you have to fear in the movie business?" ☀



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for the 2015 Katherine Singer Kovács Award for Best Essay Published in a Journal, for the essay "Absolute Advertising: Walter Ruttman and the Weimar Advertising Film", *Cinema Journal* 52.4 (2013), 49-73.

Over the last three years, members of the **Department of Film Studies at The University of St Andrews** have been honored three times with SCMS awards.

Brian Jacobson was awarded the 2013 SCMS Dissertation Award for *Studios Before the System: Architecture, Technology, and Early Cinema*.

Joshua Yumibe received Honorable Mention for the SCMS First Book Award in 2013 for *Moving Color: Early Film, Mass Culture, Modernism* (Rutgers University Press, 2012).

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**CREATING THE WITNESS**

Documenting Genocide on Film, Video, and the Internet

By Leshu Torchin, University of Minnesota Press ('Visible Evidence' series); 296pp; illustrated, paperback \$25.00, ISBN 9780816676231; hardback, \$75.00. ISBN 9780816676224

Asking the question, "How can visual media promote action?", *Creating the Witness* examines the role of film and other screen media in creating virtual witnesses to genocide over the past 100 years. The book surveys aesthetic strategies and social practices that have contributed to popular understandings of genocide and which have called upon viewers to act on behalf of human rights. "This magnificent, grounded, and rigorously researched book boldly probes a century of imaging genocides in Armenia, Germany, Rwanda, the Balkans, the Philippines, the United States, and Darfur across photography, documentary, popular culture narrative films, user-generated media and gaming." (Patricia R. Zimmermann)

<http://bit.ly/1BOFgj6>

WALTER RUTTMANN AND THE CINEMA OF MULTIPLICITY

Avant Garde – Advertising – Modernity
By Michael Cowan, Amsterdam University Press, 260pp, hardback, €99, ISBN 9879089645852

By any account, Walter Ruttmann was a pioneer of experimental and documentary film. But like many of his contemporaries in the inter-war avant garde, Ruttmann was also heavily involved in advertising and promotion work, and he would go on to make propaganda films under National Socialism. The first study of Ruttmann in English, *Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of Multiplicity* examines this little-known aspect of Ruttmann's work, but it also offers much more. Winner of the 2014 Willy Haas Award for an important book on German cinema, Cowan's study is less a biography of Ruttmann than a reflection on the surprising imbrications between experimental film and industrial society in early 20th-century Germany.

<http://bit.ly/1vZqdAO>

MONTGOMERY CLIFT*Queer Star*

By Elisabetta Girelli, Wayne State University Press, 296pp, paperback, illustrated, \$31.95, ISBN 9780814339244

"The breadth of Girelli's theoretical knowledge and the care with which she marries queer theory with detailed analyses of Clift's filmography allow *Montgomery Clift: Queer Star* to be a productive addition to queer star studies. It is a testament to both her analytic intelligence and clear passion for her subject that it will be difficult for me to watch a Montgomery Clift performance and not think of the subtleties of erotic ambivalence and gender disruption that Girelli illuminates throughout her book." (Matthew Connolly, *The Velvet Light Trap*)

<http://bit.ly/1vJ8hX>

TEXTURE IN FILM

By Lucy Donaldson, Palgrave, ('Palgrave Close Readings in Film and Television' series; series editors: John Gibbs and Douglas Pye), 208pp, hardback (and e-book), illustrated, £55, ISBN 9781137034786

Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives in art, literature and music, Donaldson develops a stimulating understanding of a concept that has received little detailed attention in relation to film. Texture has an important sensory dimension: it expresses the feel of something and thus evokes a response. Texture also encompasses broader expressions of quality and nature, relating to the weaving of cloth, a web or a narrative. *Texture in Film* contributes to the increasing body of work aiming to renew attention on sensorial experience in the cinema, through an approach to details of filmmaking decisions and evaluations of style and meaning.

<http://bit.ly/13gZyUe>

READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at *Sight & Sound*, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN. Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk

SOUND SALVATION

Criticism is subjective, but your review of *La Maison de la Radio* (*S&S*, February) displayed the reviewer's prejudices rather than dealing with the film itself. Instead of discussing Nicolas Philibert's film on its own terms, Vadim Rizov repeatedly castigates it for not being a different film from the one Philibert set out to make. His first sentence complains that it is not the sort of film Frederick Wiseman would have made, presumably drawing the comparison because it shows behind-the-scenes (or at least normally invisible) activities of an institution, namely Radio France. He makes further complaints: that the film doesn't deal in greater detail with the current events mentioned in a news broadcast; that it doesn't deal in greater detail with the issues of immigration and migrant labour; that it doesn't deal with the kind of issues a public radio station should examine; and that it has no 'stance' on the value of the cultural institution it is profiling.

But why should Philibert set out to make a Wiseman film, or a film about current events or immigration? That was not his intention. While one may argue that a national radio station should explore certain issues, *La Maison de la radio* is not a publicly funded institution, but a film. Rizov – who in his misunderstanding of the film even points to an entirely non-existent "emphasis on classical music" – complains that there is "no line of argumentation" in Philibert's portrait of Radio France. I suspect he saw no thread simply because he was looking out for things not central to Philibert's subject, which is the way radio engages with our imaginations, creating invisible but credible, almost tangible worlds using sound alone. Had Rizov thought about the constantly shifting relationships between what is shown (or not shown) and what is heard in the film – why, for example, it shows so many faces of people listening, rather than making sounds themselves – he might have been able to discover its thematic thread, and therein found its 'stance' on the value of Radio France. Philibert has never been the kind of filmmaker who makes big clear-cut statements; he has always celebrated the curiosity and imaginativeness of individuals in his films, and would surely rather we engage with them by using our own.

Geoff Andrew Senior film programmer, BFI Southbank

JUSTICE AND THE HOLOCAUST

In her review of Claude Lanzmann's *The Last of the Unjust* (*S&S*, February), Hannah McGill does not mention the work alluded to in the title, André Schwarz-Bart's 1959 novel *The Last of the Just* (*Le Dernier des justes*), which traces the experience of 12 generations of rabbinical elders from the 12th to the 20th centuries. These, the so-called 'Just', are seen within their community as sacrificial witnesses of persecution; the novel starts with anti-Semitic attacks in England at the time of the Crusades, moves through the religious

LETTER OF THE MONTH GET SHORTER



The provenance of the old line about not having had the time to write a shorter letter is uncertain, but there were some interesting comments in your February issue on the length of films. Ben Roberts (Brewster: 'If you build it') quoted Ofcom statistics suggesting younger viewers increasingly prefer short online videos to feature films, and mentioned other evidence suggesting attention spans are decreasing. Nick James (Editorial: 'Wishful Thinking') pointed to the challenge for UK films of making a profit and attracting talent in the face of increasing investment in long-form TV drama. On the BFI website early last year, Samuel Wigley ('When did films get so long?', bfi.org.uk) noted the tendency for Oscar-contenders to run over two-and-a-half hours, with length seemingly equalling prestige.

Interestingly, though the average length of feature films released in the UK has stayed constant at 105 minutes all the way back to 1974, there is a notable trend for shorter

films. While the number of films running over 150 minutes has increased, the proportion of films running 70 minutes or less has more than doubled in the last five years.

The BFI and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences define a feature film as lasting a minimum of 40 minute (other bodies suggest 60 or 80 minutes), so there is scope to produce quality films of 40-70 minutes. Such films will appeal to younger audiences, are more likely to find airtime on terrestrial TV, are cheaper to make, offer less risk for new creative talent, and allow distributors and cinemas to schedule greater variety and more screenings.

Tarkovsky liked to refer to cinema as "sculpting in time". Perhaps we need to give consideration to how shorter films might change our distribution and viewing model for the better – we should take the time to write shorter letters.

Mike Ashcroft Kendal

intolerance of the Inquisition in France, Italy and Spain and the pogroms in Eastern Europe, and ends with the death of the eponymous 'Last of the Just' in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. The novel is, I believe, well-known in France but has only recently been more widely recognised in English. One cannot help thinking that in playing on this title Lanzmann may be expressing a view of Benjamin Murmelstein's actions closer to that evident in the 1975 interviews cut from *Shoah*, which cast a harsh light on his cooperation with the Nazi authorities in Theresienstadt, rather than the more forgiving attitude that can be gleaned from the present film.

Professor Paul E. Dunne Liverpool University

GRATUITOUS VIOLET

Violet Lucca was allowed to cross a line in her review of *Birdman* (*S&S*, January). She is clearly annoyed by what she has seen, but whatever the substance of her observations on gender politics and film aesthetics, her tone fails to show any respect for the professionals and

artists involved in the production, and leads her into using language which does not befit your magazine – "shittily written women".

Sight & Sound is not *NME*. I have no interest in reading rants heavy on attitude and light on detail and appreciation of craft or consideration of context. There may be valid criticisms in this review but *S&S* is not the appropriate place for such an angry hatchet job.

Ben Morris by email

Additions and corrections

February p.62 *American Sniper*: Certificate 15, 132m 29s, ©Warner Bros Entertainment Inc, Village Roadshow Films North America Inc and RatpacDune Entertainment LLC (US, Canada, Bahamas & Bermuda), ©Warner Bros Entertainment Inc, Village Roadshow Films (BVI) Limited and RatpacDune Entertainment LLC (all other territories); p.69 *Big Hero 6*: Certificate PG, 108m 0s/IMAX prints: 107m 53s, (running time includes short film 'Feast'); p.64 *Ex Machina* USA/United Kingdom 2014, ©Universal City Studios Productions LLP Universal Pictures International and Film4 present a DNA Films production; p.73 *I Am Yours*: Certificate 18, room 3s; p.76 *La Maison de la radio*: Certificate PG, 103m 32s; p.77 *A Most Violent Year* USA/United Arab Emirates 2014, ©PM/In Finance, LLC; p.82 *Pelo malo*: Certificate 15, 93m 9s; p.84 *Point and Shoot*: Certificate 15, 83m 13s; p.85 *Selma*: Certificate 12A, 127m 39s

November 2014 p.84 *My Name Is Hmmm...*: Not submitted for theatrical classification, Video certificate 15, Running time: 121m 4s

IN A LONELY PLACE



Nicholas Ray's searing anti-climax, added on at the very last moment of the shoot, is one of the few genuinely tragic endings in *film noir*

By Imogen Sara Smith

Posters touted *In a Lonely Place* (1950) as "the Bogart suspense picture with the surprise finish!" This was false advertising, since there is nothing in the ending that you don't see during the opening credits. It is all there in the eyes of Dixon Steele (Humphrey Bogart), reflected in a rear-view mirror as he drives the dark streets of Hollywood. His eyes are wary, hunted, glittering with seeds of rage – but above all, they are bleak. They are eyes that have already seen the end, even if Dix himself doesn't know it yet.

When he meets Mildred Atkinson (Martha Stewart), a hat-check girl who is reading the trashy bestseller he's supposed to adapt for the screen, she confides: "I already know the end. I always read that first." The line strikes a chord you don't catch at the time. Mildred is close to her own very unexpected end, since she will be murdered the same night. Her death brings Dix together with Laurel Gray (Gloria Grahame), his alluring neighbour; but their affair, conducted under a cloud of police suspicion over Mildred's murder, is threatened from the start by Dix's unpredictable violence and Laurel's habit of running away from things. After one ugly scene, he recites to her some

lines he has written for his screenplay: "I was born when she kissed me. I died when she left me. I lived a few weeks while she loved me." He's not sure where the lines should go. Laurel suggests, "The farewell note?" It seems that – like Mildred – they already know the end.

There are many movies about Hollywood, many movies about movies. But *In a Lonely Place* is above all about the art of storytelling that lies at the heart of Hollywood cinema. The screenplay (credited to Andrew Solt, but heavily rewritten by director Nicholas Ray) is both a meditation on screenwriting and an example of the form at its finest. Dix constantly views life through a lens of narrative: when he tells his agent about matching wits with a police detective ("It was his story against mine – but, of course, I told mine better"); when he talks a friend and his wife through Mildred's murder as he imagines it; or when he uses an ordinary morning routine as a lesson in writing a good love scene. But Dix can't write or direct the scenes in his life: he can't control his anger or Laurel's mounting distrust of him; he can't stop driving her away with his possessiveness. That breakfast scene is not really about a couple in love but about a couple whose love is strained to breaking point. But

With all its deaths and defeats, noir rarely breaks your heart: cynicism and fatalism are defences against heartbreak

he's right that the scene – unsettling and sad and funny all at once – is a lesson in good writing.

The original screenplay ended with Dix strangling Laurel in a jealous rage and then sitting down to type the final words of his screenplay ("I was born when she kissed me...") before the police arrive. Ray shot this contrived, heavy-handed ending but immediately thought better of it; instead, he improvised a scene in which the attack is interrupted by a phone call from the police, who tell the couple that Dix has been cleared of suspicion. This good news comes too late and Dix walks away without a word, following a neatly landscaped path into a hopeless future.

This anticlimax, with its drained and burned-out flavour, is one of the few genuinely tragic endings in *film noir*. With all its deaths and defeats, *noir* rarely breaks your heart: cynicism and fatalism are defences against heartbreak. But Ray's romantic temperament was never hardened against disillusionment. *In a Lonely Place* is about the lovers' inability to transform themselves, to escape from the fixed orbits of their barren lives. But the love that they share is so alive, so captivating in its blend of easy intimacy and appreciative surprise, that for a fleeting moment we believe it will save them both. As we watch them pull apart, we are torn by an anguished ability to see both sides – what is irresistible and what is unforgivable in this man and this woman. When Laurel recites Dix's words with one crucial change ("I lived a few weeks while you loved me"), she translates them from movie poetry into what feels almost unbearably like real life. S

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